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CHRIST OUR LIFE;

OR,

EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES

ON

THE GOSPEL BY JOHN.

BY

ALEXANDER BEITH, D.D.,

FREE NORTH CHURCH, STIRLING.

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TO

WILLIAM DRUMMOND, ESQ.,

ROCKDALE LODGE.

My Dear Sir,

I DEDICATE these Discourses to you, not so much from the respect which I entertain for you as a generous friend of the glorious Gospel in difficult times, as to fulfil the wishes of the Flock of which I have the happiness to be the Pastor, and express how fully we appreciate the skill, zeal, perseverance, and munificent liberality, with which you promoted the erection and completion of the place of worship in which the Discourses were delivered.

ALEX. BEITH.

PRINCETON
REC. NOV 1881
THEOLOGICAL

PREFACE.

I HAD made considerable progress in a course of Sabbath forenoon Lectures on the Gospel by John, when an application was very unexpectedly made to me by kind friends, for whose good opinion I feel heartily grateful, that I should allow the Discourses to be taken down by a short-hand writer, and that I should myself prepare the reporter's MSS. for the press. The friends who made this application were fully aware that it is my practice to preach from bare outlines, and that these Discourses had not been written previous to being delivered. My reply to this request, "that the proposal would be found impracticable," did not prevent the experiment. The examination of a considerable number of MS. reports, however, confirmed my anticipations, and satisfied us that it would be a far easier task to write out with my own hand what I had preached, than to remodel, correct, and prepare for the printers, the papers with which I had been furnished.

A second application being made to me, I consented to write out the Discourses from the beginning of the Gospel; so that if, on publication, the present Volume, which comprehends only the First Three Chapters, proved acceptable and useful, the series might be continued in successive volumes.

It is scarcely necessary to say, that a Work prepared under such circumstances must labour under disadvantages. The happiest thoughts and most forcible illustrations of Ministers who preach from "skeleton" notes, are often suggested to them in the act of speaking, and being soon forgotten by themselves, pass away not to be recalled. Moreover, any felicitous expression which may distinguish *extempore* preaching,—which frequently, though unconsciously to the hearers, constitutes a great part of the Preacher's popularity,—disappears hopelessly when he sits down, after the lapse of a year or more, to transfer to paper the living words which he had addressed to willing ears and earnest eyes. The art of speaking and the art of writing are two very different things; and no man is so painfully conscious of it as he who is accustomed to practise the one but not the other. This Work is given to the public, under the circumstances which have been stated, in the hope that it may be blessed to do good. The "excellency of the power" is independent of all human imperfection; and its exercise is in the hands of Divine Sovereignty. To God I commit the Work in humble confidence.

To Students who have been over the same ground it will not be necessary to state the authorities which I consulted in preparing my Lectures on John. To those who have not been over the ground, but who may follow, it may not be out of place to say, that LAMPE, OLSHAUSEN, ALFORD, TITMANN, TRENCH, and HUTCHISON, have usually been my assistants and guides.

STIRLING, *Sept.* 1856.

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CHRIST OUR LIFE.

THE ETERNITY OF THE WORD.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."—John i. 1–5.

John, the writer of this Gospel, was one of the two sons of Zebedee. His brother James and he, when engaged in their occupation as fishermen, were called at the same time to become followers, and, subsequently, apostles of the Lord Jesus. John enjoyed the special friendship of Christ during the time of his abode in the world, being one of the three who, among other distinctions, were admitted to witness the transfiguration on the mount and the agony in the garden. In some particulars he was more favoured than his brother and Peter (the other two who were distinguished with this friendship), as indicated by various little incidents in the history,—such as his leaning on the bosom of Jesus at the last supper, when he was

commissioned by the other disciples to propose to their Lord the question, which of them should betray him, and his receiving the charge referring to the mother of the Lord from him when he hung upon the cross.

After the resurrection John laboured, in company with the other apostles, in preaching the gospel to "all the world," as they had received commission from their Master's lips. The power of God accompanied them according to the "promise of the Father," which began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, and which never after failed. His brethren and fellow-labourers in this high office he outlived by many years, surviving till the close of the century, when he finished his testimony, either in the isle of Patmos, to which he had been exiled for his faithful adherence to the crucified Nazarene, or very soon after his release and return from that banishment.

By the time that John was called, and endowed by the Holy Ghost, to put on record the truth given unto him, the church had become infested with many seducers. Deadly errors as to the person, the two natures, and the mediatorial offices of Christ, had even then begun extensively to prevail. Probably the germs of all antichristian heresy had by that time appeared, and might be discovered in the false principles propagated,—although these principles were not then developed as they have been in later periods in the history of the church. In the truth given to John by inspiration of God, and recorded under divine authority, her great Head was pleased to supply a testimony in opposition to the errors with which his

church was then troubled, and against all errors with which it might be troubled in the time to come: not that in the portion of Holy Writ given by John, in itself or alone, the entire testimony against these errors is to be found, but that we have in this concluding contribution, with all else existing, both in the Old and New Testaments, the completed canon, and a perfect revelation, to which no addition can be made, intended to be the guide of our faith and practice for ever.

Here it may be remarked, how infatuated they are who take as authorities in both these particulars the uninspired writers of succeeding centuries,—the FATHERS, so called. The alleged ground of their adoption as authorities is,—that they lived so close to apostolic times,—that they were personally acquainted with the apostles, or with those who had enjoyed that great privilege,—and that the opinions held by the apostles and their cotemporaries could not but be known to their immediate successors. But if, even during the times in which the apostles themselves lived, there were of the parties who heard and knew them personally, and who sincerely admired and followed them, those who wrested their doctrines, and denied or perverted the truth taught by them, how much more may we believe that such enemies must have abounded after they were gone.

Let us never forget that there is no standard of truth, and no authority in divine things, but the Word of God given by inspiration of his Spirit. There we have a "sure word," and nowhere else,—addressed as God's message to man for the obedience of faith. Whatever that may be

for which equal claims are set up, and whoever may be the advocates of those claims, let us sternly reject all; for even though assuming the appearance of angels of light, their cause cannot be of God, but must be of the wicked one.

The general object of the Gospel by John, evidently, is to prove that Christ, the "Son of man," is also the very "SON OF GOD." Written long after the other gospels, when the narratives contained in them were universally received, it does not to any extent repeat what is recorded by the earlier writers, but adds some noted incidents in the history of the blessed Saviour not furnished by them, yet peculiarly adapted to the illustration and confirmation of the truth which he had in view to make known. To a great extent, also, those incidents are made the basis on which he establishes his doctrine. In addition to this, as bearing on the same object, we have much recorded of what was spoken by Christ, both in teaching, and in prayer and intercession to his Father in heaven. Moreover, the details of his sufferings, death, and resurrection, with his subsequent appearances to his disciples, and previously to his ascending to the right hand of the Majesty above, are given with special fulness.

The first chapter, to the exposition of which we now address ourselves, in humble dependence on the divine blessing and guidance, is chiefly occupied with a testimony to the glory of Christ's person.

In the verses at present before us, in the first place, *the apostle asserts the divinity of the Saviour;* and, secondly, *he confirms his statement on that head by*

referring to his manifestation of himself to the world before his incarnation.

I. THE APOSTLE ASSERTS THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."—(Ver. 1, 2.)

1. *We have the name by which he is called;* viz., THE WORD. It is the title usually applied to him by this apostle, as may be seen in his epistles. But the same title is likewise applied to him by other writers of the Scriptures, and occurs in portions of the sacred record of which John is not the penman. One example we have in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is said, "The WORD of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in HIS sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of HIM with whom we have to do."

Why Christ is called by this name is important to be considered. In the first place, he is the chief subject of revelation. He is the WORD of promise. In him was the fulfilment of all Old Testament promise. He is the substance of all shadows, types, and prophecies, which existed before he came in the flesh,—the centre to which verge all the rays of the light of the old dispensation,—as he is also the very kernel of the gospel. For this reason he is the WORD. Secondly, As speech is the

means of revealing the mind of man to others, so Christ seems to be called by that name as being God's revelation of himself to the whole rational and intelligent creation. He is the only visible manifestation of himself which God has been pleased to make. Therefore he is declared to be "the *image* of the *invisible* God," "the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person." God is to be *seen* by his rational offspring throughout the universe only as revealed in Christ. To him the Father communicates himself in counsel, whilst it is his office to receive such communication, and to be emphatically "the Wisdom of God,"—able to say, in that capacity, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old; I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was."

It will be perceived that we do not here speak of the manifestation of God made in Christ at his incarnation, but of that which was before he became flesh, and dwelt with men. In his person, God declared himself to our first parents after they had sinned. Then they "heard the VOICE of the Lord God walking in the garden." This cannot mean that the sound of some utterance reached their ears in their hiding-place; for it occurred before any address was made to them. That WORD who had created all things, and who sustained all things, with whom they had held intercourse in transacting the great affairs of the first covenant, was now perceived by them as having come to take account of the offence of which they were painfully conscious, and to pronounce sentence. So their guilty minds told them; but it was truly a great

occasion on which this revelation of the Lord God in the person of his Son occurred. The dreaded sentence was indeed pronounced then, and the majesty of the divine law fully asserted; but the way of life—the new way—was at the same time proclaimed to the wondering ears of the guilty and fallen pair. For the first time the hidden mystery of the everlasting covenant was revealed,—that covenant in which is afforded to men and angels, for the present and all ages to come, the most glorious exhibition of the divine nature. Then the WORD first spake it, in anticipation of his assumption of humanity, and of the most amazing manifestation of the Godhead therein to all created intelligences. Other occasions of analogous revelations of God in the person of the WORD, previous to the incarnation, are recorded also; as, when he appeared to Abraham on more than one occasion, to Moses in the bush, to Joshua on the eve of the taking of Jericho, &c., &c.,—all of them great public emergencies, giving profound solemnity to the dispensation in each instance.

2. *The eternity of the* WORD *is asserted:* "In the beginning was the Word."

The truth here declared is not merely that Christ had his proper and perfect subsistence before his incarnation, but before any creature existed. It is not said, "*From* the beginning was the Word,"—as if he had been even the very first and greatest of all the works of God; but, "*In* the beginning,"—before the very first point of time at which God began to create all things, in fulfilment of his everlasting purpose.

We can travel back in thought but a little way. Some

conception we can form of the period of the existence of the world in its present aspect, now about six thousand years. Nay, we can picture to ourselves the various stages through which, in its chaotic periods, our globe, and the orbs by which it is surrounded, passed. Taking the condensed but pregnant history of those eras of progress given in the sacred volume, we can think of the gradual advance of the original rude mass towards the ultimate perfection it attained when God pronounced it "good." We can represent to ourselves the formation of stratum after stratum of the body of the earth,—the preparation, under diversified actions, of the vast stores of minerals with which our globe is everywhere stored, —the division of the firmaments,—and the separation of the sea and the dry land, with the final equipment of the completed structure, fitting it to be a meet dwelling-place for man, its future inhabitant and lord. We can travel back, in thought, to the verge of past time, when all these things had a commencement under the expressed will of God; but arrived there, we are hopelessly arrested. Then time began to count; but time is a point only in eternity. The attempt even to look away into that eternity, or into the infinity co-existent with it, which the mind of God alone can comprehend, as of him alone both are true, overwhelms us. He is the Infinite, and he is the Eternal. But in that infinity and eternity the WORD is one with him. "In the beginning was the WORD." "I was set up from everlasting. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." In the beginning the WORD subsisted; but he had subsisted

ever before. When no creature, in any form, existed, he was "in the bosom of the Father;" before all creation, he was there. "The everlasting Father," "the Creator of heaven and earth," the "heir of all things, by whom the worlds were made," is he.

How important is this great doctrine of the essential glory of Christ! Our faith contemplates him in human nature, and so we have boldness to draw near; but it must be led through that veil to the inmost shrine, where the excellent glory of his person is to be seen. There faith has its most blessed vision, its sure ground of unwavering confidence; for there it contemplates the essence of his nature; and because of that, the infinite value of his obedience and vicarious atonement, the ineffable glory of his cross. Faith may well glory when it has revealed to it his own "eternal Spirit," as the altar on which the sacrifice of sweet-smelling savour was laid. It may well be persuaded, then, that there is no more ignominy in the cross, and exclaim, "God forbid that I should glory, save in this!"

3. *The distinct personality of the Word, yet his co-existence with the Father, as undivided and inseparable from him in his essence is set forth:* "The Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Here we have distinct personality asserted, yet unity of essence. Christ is with God (the Father), and he is in God. There are two distinct persons, yet the two are one eternally as to essence and substance. Behold, then, the testimony of the Holy Ghost, the third person, to the unity of God,—to the distinction in the persons of

the Godhead,—and, especially for the great purpose in hand, his testimony to the Godhead of Christ!

Neither men nor angels are demanded to understand or explain so great a mystery as is thus presented in the testimony of truth. If we can neither understand nor explain the mystery of our own being, is it to be expected that we should understand or explain that of God? Enough for us that it is revealed—clearly revealed—the very glory of the Record which has been given to us as the expression of the Eternal mind,—revealed to faith for its obedience.

How near to us is the Most High seen in our nature! how close has he come to us! how unspeakable the grace and condescension involved, when faith accepts and reposes on the testimony referring to his person! But in what other way than that thus revealed could we regain and ultimately possess what alone can be the true dignity of our nature? That dignity must be a right relationship to Him that made us, and whose offspring, as spiritual creatures, we are,—a right relationship, conjoined with intimacy of fellowship, never again to be interrupted in all future ages. This consummation is secured by the advent of the WORD. We could not ascend to him, but he has come down to us, to restore the desolation which sin wrought, and to remove the curse.

4. *A repetition and conjunction of the first two assertions:* "The same was in the beginning with God."

It is still the doctrine of the eternity and co-existence of the Son with the Father;—as if the writer had said,

"Let there be no mistake—no doubt—as to the doctrine which I here declare; no question what I, as an inspired apostle, the latest of all the apostles, honoured to bear witness, have said: '*The same*'—'The Word'—was in the beginning with God." As we repeat over and over to a little child the lesson we desire to inculcate, or as we reiterate a statement to make it emphatic, so John, under divine guidance, here reasserts, against all cavilling that then existed, or that ever might occur, this great fundamental truth,—Christ is God,—from eternity, God,—with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God!

II. THE APOSTLE CONFIRMS HIS STATEMENT BY REFERRING TO CHRIST'S MANIFESTATION OF HIMSELF TO THE WORLD BEFORE HIS INCARNATION: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."—(Ver. 3–5.)

1. *The worlds and the things in them are not eternal.* When they began to exist we cannot tell; but they had a beginning. They are not self-existent, for they were made—made by God. To him alone belongs the honour of creation. Reason teaches that there must have been a first cause, and that he is that cause. What reason teaches, revelation confirms and makes clear.

2. *All things were made by the Word:* "All things were made by him."—(Ver. 3.) "By whom also" (speaking of the Son, Heb. i. 2) "he made the worlds." "By him" (speaking of him as the "image of the invisible

God, the first-born"—that is, 'the Prince'—"of every creature," Col. i. 16) "were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him." If creation, then, be an operation of Divine, Almighty power, behold the proof of Christ's Godhead! All creatures owe their being to him; "for he was before all things, and by him all things consist." Such is the object of our faith—our Rock; and so has he manifested himself. I do not stay at present to explain how creation is also ascribed to the Father, and in like manner to the Spirit,—to show the consistency of this, or to dwell on the great fact, that the whole works of God, at once in the natural and moral world, have as their grand intention the revelation of the divine glory, which revelation must necessarily include the mystery of the triune Jehovah, that constitutes its grand peculiarity; here we have to do simply with the fact recorded in this passage, that in the sense in which it is true of the Eternal Word, "all things were made by him," though not without the Father nor without the Spirit.

3. *He himself was not made.* For "without him was not any thing made that was made." To him was committed the creation of all things. By him God made all. Never did any thing come into existence but in this order. Thus all consists,—every creature, material or spiritual, rational or irrational, temporal or immortal. And it is particularly to be noticed how the truth thus expressed excludes Christ from the class of created beings.

Socinians, Mahometans, and Arians are willing, in their systems, to give him the very highest place,—to ascribe to him even a divine nature, on their own understanding of that term; but then it was created, and he is a creature, though it may be in a sense peculiar to himself. The doctrine of the Scripture in opposition to this is, that Christ himself is the author of every created thing, without exception or limitation. "Without him was not any thing made that was made;" so that if a creature in any sense whatever, he must have been self-created,—an absurdity which those enemies of truth do not assert.

Surely it behoves believers to rejoice, the children of Zion to be joyful in their King! Sometimes their spiritual vision is dim, the assurance of their interest in Christ obscure, and, consequently, their boldness in approaching the throne weakened. Yet even then, when other pleadings may seem feeble in their mouths, they can at least have this: "Thou art our *Creator;* thine hands did make and fashion us; thou wilt not destroy the work of thine hands; save us, for we are thine." And truly he will not destroy when that appeal is made, but answer, "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the CREATOR of Israel, your King. Though thou hast destroyed thyself, in me is thy help." It is faith's great work to stand in full view of the dignity of Christ's person.

4. *Every form of life is of him.* There are varieties in the creatures formed by the Creator,—some having greater excellencies than others. Inanimate matter is one form of being; matter connected with life, endowed

with that quality, is another and higher form. Some creatures live: in him they have their life. Some living creatures also with life have *light*,—rational, moral, immortal. In him they have it; for "in him was life, and the life was the light of men."—(Ver. 4.) Whether it be the life of plant or animal, life on the dry land or in the sea, from him it has come. The life and light of men are from him,—that life and light which we call SOUL,—for he is the Creator of their spirits. But, besides, from him was imparted originally to that soul, *the life of God*, —that supernatural endowment by which alone man could have been qualified, even in a state of innocency, for fulfilling the high destiny for which he was formed. The WORD breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and made him a *living* soul. In this way he communicated to the soul of man the image of God.

He is the fountain of life, the fountain of light also,—life and light in whatever form or in whatever degree,—whether as it appears in a gnat, a man, or an angel, in the smallest or the greatest, in animalculæ or cherubim, his glory is seen in each and in all. To manifest it he made them. "For his pleasure they are and were created."

We do not in these things speak of him as Mediator, but as the WORD, the second person of the Godhead. We have hereafter to view him as filling the subordinate office of Mediator; as yet he is presented to us by the testimony of this evangelist only in his essential and underived glory. As by him was the life of God communicated to the soul of man at creation,—which life departed when

sin entered, so that the once living then became a dead soul,—by him also must be the restoration of the life of God—the resurrection of the dead. In this consists the glory of his mediatorial work, the account of which fills the Scripture, and forms the great revelation of his character,—the mystery which constitutes the admiration of the highest who surround the throne in heaven. He makes all things new. In him the saved are created unto good works, as by him they are redeemed from the curse of a broken law. But I anticipate.

5. *The restoration of the ruined is of him.* After the world and its inhabitants were created by the Word, and made resplendent with light and life, darkness came. Sin entered, and the great change in the condition of man and in his relations to God ensued. Then, as I have said, the soul lost its life and died,—it was stripped of the qualification with which it had been endowed, without which it was not capable of fulfilling God's intention in its case. Darkness, the very shadow of death, fell on the world,—a darkness of the same kind with that which fell on the angels which kept not their first estate, whose follower man had now become. To their fate he might have been left,—to the "blackness of darkness for ever." So, however, it was not! Behold the annunciation as to our world: "The light shineth in darkness."—(Ver. 5.) Here is the first note by this evangelist announcing the great mediatorial office. The light began to shine immediately. In Eden the great truth of the new manifestation of the divine glory in the person of the Eternal Word had its first intimation. Ever since the light

shineth, and, alas! "shineth in darkness." As a sad universal truth, moreover, "the darkness comprehendeth it not." In the world before the flood, by means of such ordinances as then existed by divine appointment, the light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. Subsequently, and until the incarnation of the Word, it was the same. Taking the entire history of the world, in its moral aspect, in all the time previous to the appearing of Christ on earth, the description in these words holds true. Never was God without a witness. Testimony for the manifestation of his true character to those who had lost, because they had cast away the knowledge of him, never was wanting: under various forms, and by various means, the light shined, but shined in vain; and in the utter failure of all appeared the grand necessity for the personal appearance of the WORD in our nature, as that failure was likewise the great preparation for it. "In the fulness of time" he did come; and this introductory statement of the evangelist is made to prepare the way for the announcement of the glorious mystery, that "the WORD was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Here is the manifestation of the divine Majesty on which we are invited to look. Here we are to see God. Thus he reveals himself to faith,—reveals himself for the recovery of the lost,—and he that hath seen Christ hath seen God. "He that honoureth the Son honoureth the Father; and he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which sent him."

THE FORERUNNER.

"THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD, WHOSE NAME WAS JOHN. THE SAME CAME FOR A WITNESS, TO BEAR WITNESS OF THE LIGHT, THAT ALL MEN THROUGH HIM MIGHT BELIEVE. HE WAS NOT THAT LIGHT, BUT WAS SENT TO BEAR WITNESS OF THAT LIGHT. THAT WAS THE TRUE LIGHT, WHICH LIGHTETH EVERY MAN THAT COMETH INTO THE WORLD."—JOHN I. 6–9.

WE have seen that the preceding verses of this chapter testify of Christ's glory as the Eternal WORD,—his glory manifested in his works before sin entered our world, and, after that change, until the period of his incarnation. This testimony is introductory to the main purpose of the evangelist in this chapter; which is, to set forth that cardinal truth, the manifestation of the WORD in human nature,—his being made flesh,—the "mystery of godliness,"—the great event in the history of the world looked forward to from the beginning, and *in* the beginning,—that with reference to which all other manifestations of his glory were given, both previous to the entrance of sin and subsequently.

To this topic the evangelist advances at the 6th verse,—first speaking of the Lord's Forerunner, who came to prepare the way before him. Of him he speaks, that he may record his testimony; which he does at length, as

we shall find. But, before doing so, having spoken of the Baptist, and shown the distinction between him and the mighty One whose approach he heralded, he resumes, on his own part, at the 9th verse, the theme of Christ's excellencies in his manifestations of himself, not recording John's testimony till he comes to the 15th verse.

We now speak,—I. Of *the mission of John the Baptist.* II. Of *the distinction between Christ and John.*

I. The Mission of John the Baptist:—

1. *John's mission was immediately connected with the appearing of the Word in the flesh.* And his employing the Baptist in accomplishing his arduous and important mission, was pre-eminently illustrative of "the light shining in the darkness." That John was to appear, to go before the face of the long-promised Messenger of the covenant, to prepare men's minds to receive their Lord, was the subject of prophecy. The last of the prophets, by whom God spake to the world previous to the era distinguished by John's appearance, foretold it. His prophecy and John's appearance were links which, though in the one case greatly prolonged, united the two periods. Each of the evangelists, accordingly, records John's ministry as the fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy, and introduces the history of gospel times by the detail of the Baptist's public career.

John was a preacher, though not, in the ordinary sense, a "minister of the New Testament;" and in him we have an example and evidence of the fact, that the Eternal Word, in manifesting his glory, in making his

light to shine, employs the instrumentality of men. He thus condescends to human weakness; for agents more exalted in their nature we might not be able to endure. By such an arrangement, moreover, he tests our obedience, —our acknowledgment of his authority in the revelation of his will by the weak instruments whom he employs. By them, when they speak his truth, he does great things,— making wise the simple, and converting those who are "dead in sin;" and thus puts to the trial the submission to him of those who hear their word,—they who receive his servants being held to receive himself, and they who refuse them to refuse himself. A solemn responsibility is ever produced by the presence of a faithful ministry. Christ is thereby revealed; he thereby makes his appeal. Who will believe the report? accept the truth? own the supremacy of Him who speaks? John held but a subordinate place, when compared with the Lord whose messenger he was. How deeply sensible of the inferiority he himself was, the context will show. Yet John's course is recorded by all the evangelists. He was less, in one sense, than the least of those who held the same office under the gospel dispensation; but he was a minister of Christ,—he spake of him, and invited sinners in his name; so he is honoured in the mention which is made of him and of his work.

2. *John's mission was of God:* "He was a man sent from God."—(Ver. 7.) It behoves every minister to be so. He that runs unsent to the work of the ministry, has no reason to expect but that he shall run in vain. If there be a presiding Head, to him it belongs to make

every appointment to the truly sacred office of ambassadors of the kingdom; and without him it must, in every instance, be a presumptuous assumption to fill that office.

We do not speak of extraordinary calls, as in the case of the apostles, or the prophets of the previous dispensation,—for, subsequently to the "sealing up of the vision and the prophecy," no such supernatural commissions were to be given,—but of ordinary calls, their reality being determined by the gifts and various qualifications for the ministry conferred, manifest vocation to the work in Providence, and the opening of a door of usefulness, —all under the exercised scriptural superintendence of the Church acting through her rulers;—calls, not ultroneous and unwarrantable assumptions of no higher origin than the will of men with an eye only to the world and to worldly objects,—not this, but what is of God; his will being made satisfactorily evident, as he can make it, and as he uniformly does, to them who wait for him.

It is necessary for ministers themselves that they should hold a clear commission from the God of all grace. Such encouragement as this only can give they require,— such support also as it affords, with the hope of success which it inspires. Necessary it is also for those to whom they go forth. To them ministers must be men "sent from God," felt and acknowledged to be so; representatives, in one view, of Him of whom they testify, "in his stead" praying them to be reconciled. In every instance it must be held by the hearers, that Christ has said in effect to the servant who addresses them: "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that refuseth you

refuseth me, and he that refuseth me refuseth him that sent me." When the case is otherwise; when neither minister nor people advert to the required origin of the solemn relation in which they stand to each other; when that relation is thought of merely as a matter of human arrangement, without reference to Him on whose shoulder the government is laid, and who holds in his own hands the keys of the house, the results must always correspond. God is not in their thoughts, therefore his blessing and the presence of his power cannot be looked for in their meetings. A matter of human secular appointment, such a ministry can be followed only by secular effects,—its origin the earth, its fruits will be earthly too.

As John's mission was of God, so was his name. It was given as part of the special revelation made to his father before he was formed in the womb. May we not believe, that being of such authority, the name was intended to be emblematically descriptive of the proper character of all who should be messengers of his and our Lord, as it was certainly descriptive of the nature of John's vocation? "Thou shalt call his name John,"—that is, GRACIOUS; one to whom the Lord was to be gracious, and one who should ever be employed in making known divine grace,—the unspeakable love of God in Christ Jesus! And ought not this to be the description of every man who fills the office of the ministry? Ought he not to be one who has himself been made a partaker of the saving grace of God, and who, thus qualified and otherwise endowed, lives to make that grace known to others? May the Lord of the harvest

send forth such men! Let all his people pray him to do it; for truly the harvest is great, and labourers of such a stamp are few.

3. *John's mission had as its special end to testify of Christ.* He "came for a witness, to bear witness of the light."—(Ver. 7.) His work was to testify,—to speak the whole truth of Christ,—not a part, but the whole. It was to point out his excellencies, his unspeakable value to lost men. It was to proclaim him in his person, his offices, and all the benefits flowing from him in these. In one word, it was to announce his glory as the "LIGHT,"—the hope, the only hope of this dark world, that to which it must be exclusively indebted for all that distinguishes it from the world of the damned. If life, and peace, and comfort, were to visit and possess the place of man's present habitation, from him they were to proceed, and John's business was to make all men know it. For this he came. God sent him on this high errand, and John came because God did so send him "for a witness, to bear witness of the light."

Such is the special end, too, of all who are "*sent* from God,"—all heaven-appointed ministers. It is to set Christ forth, with all plainness of speech, with all fidelity, all fulness, all boldness,—not adding any thing to the testimony committed to their trust to be declared, and not withholding any thing,—to set him forth with all constancy and increasing perseverance under every variety of circumstances,—persuaded that they are his very mouth to men, as he fulfils the great office of Messenger of the Covenant.

And let it never be forgotten, that the present witnessing of ministers must have reference to the future,—the future of the shepherds and of their flocks, when both shall be confronted, and when all shall be able to judge whether what was spoken corresponded to that which shall then be seen. It is required of a steward that a man shall be found faithful; and all ministers must, on that day, have, in the conscience and mind of those among whom they served, a verdict of acquittal, a testimony that they are, if not servants to whom, under Christ, they owe their souls, at least such as are free of their blood.

4. *The aim and object of John's preaching was to bring sinners to believe in Christ:* He bore witness of the Light, "that all men through him might believe."—(Ver. 7.)

This was not merely God's intention in sending him, but also the desire which reigned in his own heart,—the principle which moved him in all his ministry. If the terrors of the law were uttered by him,—and who more faithful in the use of that "hammer which breaketh the rock in pieces" than he?—it was that they to whom he spoke the "great things" which proceeded from him should be convinced and alarmed, and made to feel that without Christ their case was hopeless. If he proclaimed the glory of Christ's person, of his work and offices, with the ardour of soul which distinguished all his witness-bearing, it was that the remedy might be made to appear equal to the calamity which demanded it in its full extent. If he taught the infinite breadth of the "commandment," and the necessity of personal holiness, in the faithful

keeping of the law, it was to commend the abundance of grace treasured up in the Head, grace inseparably associated with his "gift of righteousness."

All true ministers of Christ ever have the same object. If they witness of Christ,—if they seek to exalt him in all that they speak,—it is that men may believe in him. What they speak must have this intention, purpose, tendency, as its very life. By this all must be sanctified; otherwise, their preaching will be like a body without the soul,—a putrid and vile carcase: for if they preach aright, they preach, not that their hearers should esteem them, but that they should esteem Christ,—and not only esteem, but "believe" in him unto salvation. It was no inconsistency in John's ministry, considering this to have been his aim, that he spoke severely; that he addressed those who gathered to hear his word as a "generation of vipers,"—demanding that they should forsake their evil ways, urging repentance, a universal change in heart and life; his aim still was, that "through him all men might believe." His severe denunciations, his heart-stirring remonstrances and appeals, had reference to this great end contemplated by him in dealing with men; so likewise had his exhibition of the glory of the LIGHT. The wounds required to be searched and cleansed, whatever might be the pain connected with the process, that the mollifying ointment and tender binding-up then employed might bring cure and relief.

And here it is not to be overlooked, that John's ministry contemplated "all" to whom he addressed himself. He made no distinction, as he did not respect the persons

of men. All were invited to Christ; none were debarred from coming, and no conditions were stated. Whatever might be their previous character, their present state, rank, or station, name or profession, they were held bound, when they heard the word of his testimony, to make the right use of it,—to accept it,—to come,—to believe in Christ,—to embrace, and to rest on him as the one hope of the soul. Christ was made known as the only refuge for sinners, whether great or small. All indeed did not believe who heard John,—it was their guilt, when so highly favoured, that the great majority of them did not believe,—but all were bound to believe. That was clearly their duty on hearing the testimony of the heaven-sent minister.

The same truth holds now, and at all times. The Gospel is preached that sinners may be brought to Christ, and that they may believe in him. They who come from God as messengers to their fellow-men, come on this errand. If they seek any other object, and do not seek this, they are guilty; and if those to whom they are sent disregard that object, God is dishonoured, whilst their souls perish under the condemnation of a disobedience and rebellion of which they could not have been guilty but for their unspeakable privilege of having afforded them a most blessed opportunity of escape and salvation.

"Knowing the terrors of the Lord," we would persuade men. But will ye be persuaded? What is the "gain" for which ye lose your souls, in declining to yield to the power of the truth spoken in the name of Christ? Is it worldly pleasure? is it the profit of earthly things? is it the gratification of your inferior nature? is it pleasing

the flesh, and making provision for that? is it ministering to desires which cannot be ministered unto except within the limits of this present life? If so, how long will ye be able to pursue this course? How many years' purchase is *your* heaven worth? Ah! be wise. This is the accepted time, and Christ stands at your door. "Believe, and your souls shall live." This we speak in faith that the Spirit is present with power to apply, and that his office is to make the word effectual.

II. The distinction between Christ and John: "He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."—(Ver. 8, 9.)

In these words we have the evident correction of an error which existed in the times of the evangelist. When the Baptist first appeared in his public vocation, there were those of his hearers and followers who hesitated in their opinion of his real character and office,—who doubted and mused in their minds whether he was not the Christ. He himself gave no countenance to such a speculation, but was most faithful in declaring that he was not the Christ, and in demonstrating the place which he filled in the Church in his time. He was no more than the "voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." But he was *that*. He was the "friend of the Bridegroom;" though at so great a distance from him in dignity and glory as not to be worthy even to unloose his shoe's latchet,—to do for him the meanest and most menial service. Still some con-

tinued to cling to the foolish idea which had got possession of their minds; and onwards in the history of the Church, even after Pentecostal times, there were believers who had been baptized only with John's baptism,—a sect of Christians called by John's name.

A testimony is borne in the words before us against this error, embracing a vindication of the proper glory of Christ. John was not that Light. He was a light,—"a burning and a shining light,"—endowed with grace and gifts to be so,—one of those who, as being of the golden candlestick, are qualified and appointed to shine as "lights in the world." That was his office; no more. Being of the old dispensation properly,—now on the eve of passing away,—"the least" of those to be employed in work similar to his under the new dispensation should be "greater" than he. Yet he was a "burning and a shining light," although not "*that* Light." Whilst all honour was given to him,—and we shall meet hereafter with the full testimony of his Lord on this point,—no part of the honour belonging only to Christ was given: that is a glory which cannot be given to another.

In the marked distinction thus made between the forerunner and Him who "coming after was preferred before him," we may have an intended reproof of all overweening thoughts which may be cherished of mere instruments, however valuable. The servant is never to be taken out of his place: to do it is to create disorder, and to commit an evil full of dangerous results. Servants are, indeed, to be highly esteemed for their work's sake, as ambassadors of the King: but they are not Christ; and no part of the

honour due only to him is to be paid to them,—no honour whatever of the same kind, or in the same sense. One part of the black indictment against Rome is that her priests sit in the temple of God,—in His very place,—showing themselves as if they were God,—claiming and receiving actually what belongs only to him. No claim of the kind was made for the Baptist, than whom there was no servant of those born of woman greater in his Master's estimation. On the contrary, the error of friends who too highly esteemed him is made the subject of a divine refutation. Let the thought of any thing approaching the dark impiety of Romish pretensions be far from every true minister of Christ. He that is "least" among them, the same is "greatest." Their best qualification, their only distinction, is to be willing to be as a candlestick; a means simply for exhibiting the light, holding it up, though not the light itself.

John's true honour was that he occupied only the place of a servant proclaiming his Master's glory. In doing this he administered the outward ordinance of preaching; but the power to render this effectual for the purpose intended required to come from Christ himself. John could baptize with water, which was, indeed, just a counterpart, in one sense, of the outward ordinance of preaching; Christ, not he, could baptize with the Holy Ghost, *as with fire.* All ministers sent from God are in the same position. Their charge is the outward ordinances,—no more. They are the earthen vessels into which the treasure must be put; but they are not themselves the treasure, nor have they of themselves the power

to convey it to others. They are like Gideon's lamps,—the results following their service being as truly of God as it was of God that Gideon obtained his victory.

Let it be observed, John's honour was not denied to him, more than Christ's special glory, in the testimony here, was withheld from him. Though he was not "that Light," yet he "was sent to bear witness of that Light." Neither is the honour really due to true ministers of the Lord to be refused to them. They are to be "esteemed." They are also to be "obeyed" when they deliver Christ's message "in his stead;" when they speak as though God did by them beseech men to be reconciled; and we may be sure that He whose "eyes see, and whose eyelids try" all, has regard to the relation which, by his divine authority, he has established between the ministry and those to whom they minister.

The distinction in Christ's case from John and from all mere servants is, that he is "the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He is himself "Light," not as if it were derived, or he were dependent on another for it. No creature is, in the same sense, "light." They may receive from him, and reflect what they receive; they may thus make him manifest,—their work and object being so to do,—but they are not the light. As "lights," they are mere reflectors—mirrors—diffusing the illumination that falls on them from without; but which is not theirs as its source or origin. As the planets are distinguished from the sun, so are they from the "true Light." Ministers shine, but it is because Christ illuminates them; and the light which they

exhibit to the world is just "the knowledge of his glory," derived from himself, and never possessed, nor the power of communicating it, but as bestowed by himself. In him and through him do they become available as "lights." In the Baptist's case this was true, as it must be true in all whom Christ employs.

Whatever, then, may be the light existing in the world, it is derived from him. Reason,—the light of nature,—was originally given by him. Sin has obscured, injured, and destroyed it; still, such as it is, to him that light is to be ascribed. Human reason is a besmeared and broken mirror, having all the defects which such a condition implies, still it is of him, as its original framer. To him, therefore, in the character ascribed to him in the text, we trace all knowledge of the arts and sciences, all inventions and discoveries, the fruit of human genius and toil. That in the present times "many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased," we must attribute to him, not only as having originally endowed the human mind, but as still imparting to it the power by which it acts.

Specially he is the source of spiritual and saving light, not only of that which falls on the mind, and enriches it, but of that which penetrates the soul, pervades, and possesses it for ever; and which, in so doing, becomes the sure token of the approach of the day of full, unclouded, heavenly, eternal light. Every man, individually, is called to be thus endowed. Then will he have God as his portion, and Christ's grace and the Spirit's presence will continue to bless him.

THE TREATMENT OF CHRIST BY MEN.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—John i. 10–13.

We have shown that the doctrine of the first part of this Gospel, generally, is, that the "invisible God" has from "the beginning" manifested himself in the person of the Eternal Word. Never has he, at any time, by any creature, been seen but in the Word. He only is the image of the "invisible God,"—the "Son who hath declared him."

By the Word all things were created; and so God was manifested. In him was the "life" which distinguished the nature of some of the creatures; by communicating which to man God was manifested. In him, likewise, was the "Light," with the "Life," by which the nature of others was ennobled, exalted, and qualified for a high place amidst the works of God; by imparting which to man God was, in like manner, manifested. And thus, before sin entered this world, he was seen in the Word

in all things,—in creation in all its forms, moral as well as material.

After sin came, though "blackness of darkness" was the result due, and the result to be expected, that great evil was not permitted to fall on us. The world was not abandoned to that fate. Light shined in the darkness, although the darkness did not comprehend it. God continued to manifest himself,—as previously, so then, in the person of the WORD. This he did "at sundry times, and in divers manners;" all, however, being preparatory to the foreordained, and, from the beginning, predicted manifestation in the WORD'S incarnation and advent,—the grand central event in the history of the universe.

The evangelist enters on the history of that divine ordinance by announcing the appearance of the forerunner,—the messenger who, it was predicted, should go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his way,—recording his mission, and keeping clear the distinction between him and the Lord, whose servant he was.

All these points have been dealt with; and next we are called to consider a general statement, of an anticipatory character, bearing directly on the things which are to follow,—I. *The treatment Christ met with in the world;* and, II. *His grace towards all who received him.*

I. THE TREATMENT WHICH CHRIST MET WITH IN THE WORLD: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not."—(Ver. 10, 11.)

Two classes of men are here spoken of, and the treatment given by them respectively to the incarnate Son of God is declared:—

1. *Those called "the world," of whom it is said that "they knew him not."*

With reference to this class, Christ "was in the world." From the creation to his incarnation he was in the world. Then, as he is now, he was there,—in his essence, filling heaven and earth,—in his providence, preserving, upholding, and regulating all things,—in many various dispensations making himself known. The evangelist's argument in support of his position that Christ was in the world is, that *he made* it. As all creatures had acquired their being at his hand, it was impossible they could continue to subsist without him. They were no less dependent for their continued subsistence than for their original creation on his power and goodness. Therefore all benefits and blessings connected with their condition were derived from him, and were to be ascribed to him. And thus, that he "made the world," necessarily involved the truth that he was in it. "By a continued kind of creation he preserved all things in their being and working, and governed them to their ends. He was the first mover that set all the wheels a-working; one wheel might move another, but all were moved by the first."

In these circumstances, they who are here described by the term, "the world," did not know him. On their part there was no proper recognition of Christ in his glorious character, as that was revealed to them. They were in a condition in which they might have known

much of him. This was true, having respect to the natural faculties with which they were endowed, viewing those faculties even under all the injury which sin had wrought: injury, however, for which they were accountable and he was not. It was true, also, having respect to the evidences of his being, and of the nature of his universal government, which were plentifully present to them. They had not, we may admit, what are properly called the "lively oracles of God," yet they had a record,—a record which they were sufficiently endowed to be qualified to read,—a record written on the heavens and the earth, on the sea and the dry land,—written everywhere—on their experience, as well as on their consciences and mind, so that they were a "law unto themselves," to be read and studied always. If, then, it was demanded that Christ should be known by "the world," and if the complaint and condemnation be that they did not know him, no unrighteousness is done. In this we have not the austere master taking up what he laid not down, or reaping what he had not sown; but the just Lord demanding service corresponding to the provision made for it, the righteous judge pronouncing sentence in equity and truth when that service had not been rendered.

This ignorance of Christ was the sin of "the world." It is its sin still,—a sin for which there is no excuse. That amidst such manifestations of himself as at all times he afforded,—manifestations of the "invisible things of him, even his eternal power and Godhead,"—with their capacity to discern them, men should have represented to themselves his glory in the forms in which they did, was with-

out excuse. That they should have "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things," was without excuse. That, generally, they should, in remote or more recent times, have "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator," was without excuse. Whereas, if they had employed their natural reason about God as about other matters, they might have been led to know, acknowledge, and glorify him in many things, offering a more reasonable worship and service than they ever did, they failed in this duty, they were without excuse; and they so sinned, that God shall be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judgeth them.

Looking to ourselves, who will deny that, apart from the responsibilities created by Christ's manifestation of himself in his word and ordinances, the record which he has provided in the things which he hath made, and in the providence by which he sustains and regulates all, justly requires at our hand a religion unspeakably more earnest, devout, and sincere, than is actually practised even by many who possess, along with all the rest, the book of life? What acknowledgment is there of him by "the world" approaching that which is due on the grounds thus declared?—what reverence and submission, corresponding to the great fact that "he is in the world which was made by him," the right to which is his, and only his? Is he not virtually set aside there? He hath not left himself without a witness, in that he gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with

food and gladness; yet how studiously do men *not know him!* Every breath drawn, every pulse that beats, is because he sustains us; every hour of ease and enjoyment which, with soft and grateful wing, flies over us, is of him,—of his providential arrangement and benevolent bestowal; yet men *know* him not! It is irksome to them to be asked to remember or to honour him, whilst they really partake of his goodness. To introduce his name or allude to his claims, is to draw a shade over the joy which has no other source than himself and the gifts of his royal grace. Not more literally was he a solitary and despised outcast in Judah and Jerusalem in the days of his flesh, when men "hid their faces from him," than he is now generally as *not known* by "the world!" We ask, can such sin pass with impunity? Could you desire that the God of heaven and earth should be such a God as to permit it to pass with impunity?—as to permit the law of nature, in its first great commandment, a commandment comprehensive of all the rest, to be trampled under foot, and his glory, who wrote that law originally on the human heart, to be laid in the dust? Let no man deceive himself. Though the careless may hide themselves from the light of the truth which has been given by inspiration,—though they may succeed in silencing conscience, through the ignorance in which, by such conduct, they keep it,—there is enough in the testimony for Christ which exists exclusive of revelation, to give power to that witness for God in every man's soul. "Christ is in the world, the world was made by him;" and this being so, that "the WORLD" should not "KNOW" him, will prove the condemnation of even

the least favoured in point of privilege of all the sons of men, when the Judge has at length assumed his throne, and when the season of forbearance has clean gone for ever.

2. *Those called "his own," of whom it is said that "they received him not."*—(Ver. 11.)

Let us understand who are thus described.

All mankind belong unto the Lord, and may be designated "his own." He has the highest interest in men of every name, as his hands did make and fashion them, and as his power every moment sustains them. From him they derive life, and breath, and all things. At his pleasure they live and die; as by his appointment each individual occupies his place, whatever it may be. But the text speaks not of mankind generally here. They are described by the other term, "the world;" by "his own" a different body are meant.

Again, the elect,—the truly converted,—all who have been called and justified, having the adoption of children, —are his. They are "his own," in the highest sense; as the gift of the Father to him,—the special token of the love which the Father hath for the Son; also as being his own purchase, in terms of the everlasting covenant, as well as by being renewed through the power of his grace, made effectual for their salvation. But neither are the elect they who are described in the text by the term under consideration. Of them it cannot, in any just sense, be said that they "receive him not." We therefore still ask, Who are meant?

As distinguished from both these, Christ has what (for want of a more suitable term) we call his "visible Church." That the portion of mankind so described

are denominated "his own," in contrast to "the world," arises from their possession of advantages peculiarly distinctive, of great spiritual importance, and involving the highest responsibilities. To them are committed "the oracles of God,"—the ordinances of the kingdom; which ordinances are the appointed channels of divine communication and heavenly blessings. To them is given the glorious privilege to be within reach of the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb." Such is Christ's interest in them—such their relation to him; truly warranting the application of the description, "HIS OWN." They are in covenant. An engagement exists on the part of Christ to them, and on theirs to him, in its terms clearly defined, confirmed and attested also by appropriate seals. Christ is under engagement to all whom he has introduced to the relation in question, to grant them "eternal life," with all the blessings of every kind therewith connected, through the ordinances. They are under engagement to him to seek, in the use of the ordinances, that gift, and to accept it,—to employ the ordinances for this end, not for another,—to deem, that if that be not secured by them, the "grace of God" has to them been in vain.

Virtually, such was the covenant with Israel at Sinai, in the outward arrangements of which we see the development and systematic completion of what had previously existed in every age of the world. The Sinaitic covenant had, indeed, a temporal aspect and a temporal object. There was the engagement on the part of Christ, that he should bring the people in safety into the land of

promise, through their obedience to the law which he gave them,—the good statutes by which they were, in that sense, to live. The engagement on their part was, that they should go up to possess the inheritance, in simple reliance on him who was their acknowledged leader, and in faith on his word. This covenant, however, had not simply a temporal aspect and object, but likewise a typical. The exodus was typical; the baptism in the sea and in the cloud, the manna, the water from the rock, and all the subsequent procedure, with the passage of Jordan, until the rest was attained, were so. The grand aim of the covenant in its engagements, promises, and blessings, as thus shown, was very high. It contemplated, not a temporal deliverance, salvation, and rest merely, but a spiritual and an eternal. No doubt there were those in the camp of Israel (there were many,—all, in short, who were not of the "Israel whom God had *chosen*"), who looked not beyond the temporal aspect and object, just as there are thousands now whose impressions of the things of God are in like manner secular and carnal. But there were others in the camp, believers such as Moses, and Joshua, and Aaron, and Miriam, with all like-minded, who, accepting the typical instruction, looked through the shadows to the glorious substance of the covenant, and were "pilgrims and strangers," as Abraham and his spiritual successors had been,—in the same sense with them,—and not merely as literal travellers to the earthly Canaan, seeking a country, even the "better country," that is, an heavenly.

The true covenant at Sinai, as in the day when God

spake by his WORD to the guilty pair in the garden of Eden, was an engagement of free grace on the part of the glorious Head, to bestow upon all who should accept it "eternal life," through the ordinances then instituted,—ordinances which conducted the sinner to the "Lamb slain," as his only hope. It was the Gospel in the form in which the Gospel was then made known. It was Christ himself standing, and saying, "Open unto me,"—"if any man will open the door, I will come in unto him, and sup with him, and he with me." The engagement, on the other side, corresponding to this, was one virtually to receive him on his offer, to close with him for salvation, and to become his by every tie by which the soul ought to be bound to him.

We know how unfaithful and unsteadfast in the covenant the people of Israel were. Even in its temporal aspect, and as to its temporal object, they proved themselves to be "uncircumcised in heart and in ears, always resisting the Holy Ghost." How much more was this true of their relation to the covenant in its grand aim and character! Their carcases fell, therefore, in the wilderness, and vengeance was taken on their inventions. But, notwithstanding this, the purpose of God was not frustrated. A generation was raised up who were not like their fathers,—a generation who accepted the covenant in its temporal object, and entered at length upon its promised good,—a generation who did not refuse to go over Jordan, but who, by solemn dedication of themselves to the Lord in all the terms of the covenant, under the leadership of Joshua, ultimately received the full possession

of the recompence of reward. So too, unquestionably, there was a generation,—even during the severe discipline of those forty years in the wilderness, as well as subsequently,—who accepted the covenant for their spiritual salvation, and reached the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Who can tell how many spiritual and sanctified followers of the cloud there were, whose dust mingled with the sands of the desert (under the sentence which in the wilderness extended to some of God's saints, the most honoured of men upon whom the light of heaven ever shone), whilst their spirits ascended to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom above? Who can tell how many, whilst they tasted the waters which followed their devious course, drank of the spiritual Rock, which Rock was Christ; who, whilst they tasted the manna, fed spiritually on the "true bread," which the Father gave them, even on Him who in the fulness of time came down from heaven that he might give life unto the world; those to whom their circumcision was a seal of their worshipping God in the spirit, of their rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh; and to whom all their visits to the tabernacle, and all the offerings presented there, were not only means of present spiritual communion, but the foretaste of future heavenly happiness?

The case is not changed as to ourselves. The burdensome dispensation, whose outward glory was the tabernacle and the temple, has passed for ever. The consummation which it foretold, its connection with which imparted to it all its significance and value, has

come. Carnal ordinances have given place to the *heavenlies*, and have been superseded by them. It is no longer a system of superb shadows that exists, but the very "substance" itself to which the *shadows* all pointed, the advent of which was essential to the prophetic importance of the shadows in all subsequent ages of the church. The covenant, however, is the same. Christ offers himself, and engages to bestow "eternal life" through the "heavenly" ordinances,—the "earthly" no longer existing. We engage to accept him,—we engage "to be the Lord's,"—to employ the ordinances for this end. Spiritual and everlasting salvation he gives: spiritual and everlasting salvation we profess to accept. Baptism is the sign of this engagement. In that ordinance is set forth what he promises to impart and what we engage to receive; whilst by its administration is represented the actual engrafting into him which alone can obtain the blessing.

As under the old dispensation, so under the new, thousands are false and perfidious in this covenant. Their words are good, but their heart is not right within them. Perhaps more NOW than then, men flatter God with their mouth, and lie unto him with their tongues,—using his ordinances for every thing and any thing, rather than the one object which their soul's case requires, and for which he in his mercy and compassion has provided them. But true though this be, true also it is that there is a seed,—the chosen Israel,—whose "engagement to become the Lord's" is, through his own grace, faithfully fulfilled—who see and believe in the Son, therefore have everlasting life, and who shall be raised up at the last

day. They are not all Israel who are of Israel; but now, as in past times, there is a "true circumcision," "a circumcision in heart and spirit, whose praise is not of man, but of God,"—there is "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people."

In every age the "vineyard in the very fruitful hill" has existed, fenced off from the surrounding wilderness, all care of the husbandman bestowed on it, the stones gathered away, the choicest vine planted, the tower built in the midst of it, and the wine-press prepared. Whilst the whole earth and the fulness thereof is the Lord's, this vineyard is specially his. There he bestows his great love. Within its inclosure, and amidst its abundant privileges, he expects to find that which will please him,—thither he comes for his "pleasant fruit." If that vineyard yield but "wild grapes,"—such fruit as might be gathered beyond its precincts, where the cultivation bestowed on it is unknown; if the Master seeing this demands, "What do ye, and what are ye more than others?" what shall we say? If "the world," and "his own," be equal as to all the good which he contemplates to bestow, and all the glory he expects to receive, if there be no distinction, what shall we say to that? Too often is it so. The complaint in the text, "He came unto HIS OWN, and his own received him not," is much the same as, "He was in the world, and the world knew him not."

"He came unto his own." There was kindness, but it was all on his part. They did not seek him,—he came unto them. He sought them out,—he solicited them. How true was this when Moses and Aaron appeared with

his commission amidst the oppressed tribes in the land of Ham! how true that he heard their cry and visited them in their sore affliction! how true, when with a strong arm, and at great cost, he delivered them from the oppressor, and compelled him to let them go — giving Egypt and Ethiopia for them!

He allured and brought them into the wilderness. There he came unto them as "HIS OWN." There he offered himself unto them, as he ever continued to do in all periods of their history. But they would have none of him,—they received him not. Such was the general fact in their history, confirmed by their entire course. At Sinai they chose their calf,—at Jordan they turned back; idolatry and rebellion formed the main features which, with some rare exceptions, always distinguished Israel as a people. When he slew them, then they sought him, and, for a little, they returned and inquired after God; but again they provoked and grieved him. By his prophets he came unto them; and then, too, they received him not. "Which of the prophets," said Stephen, "have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

In our text, the evangelist speaks of the rejection of the incarnate WORD, of which, also, Stephen testified. When he descended, he came unto "HIS OWN." Of the house of David, of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham, born in Bethlehem, brought up in Nazareth,

manifested unto Israel, seeking the lost sheep of that name, he came unto "HIS OWN," and they received him not. To them he was "as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form nor comeliness,—no beauty that they should desire him." Therefore he was "despised and rejected" of them. "They denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them; and killed the Prince of life." As one rejected, he wept over Jerusalem, as one upon whom they had turned their backs when he would have gathered them as a bird gathereth her brood under her wings. Their defence and protection from coming calamities, as well as their great Saviour, he would have been, but they would not.

The history of the people Israel is a mirror of truth and of intense power to all described by the term "HIS OWN,"—all to whom privileges such as theirs have been given in the economy of grace. What has the so-called Christian church proved itself to be, in all its branches, in every period, till the present time? How sadly true is it of that Church, that Christ has come unto "HIS OWN," and that they received him not! What flattering words, from feigned lips and evil hearts, have ever been addressed to him! When he looked for grapes, behold how he found only wild grapes!

Surely it becomes us, the partakers of many precious privileges, to bear in mind, that the nearer the outward relation to Christ, the more direct and free the offer; so much greater the sin when these advantages are not used for the end contemplated in bestowing them,—so much the worse does he take it, that he is neglected and set aside.

It is bad enough that he should be in the world,—the world which he has made and endowed with all the good for which it is valued by those who possess it,—and that they should refuse to know him: that they should feel his every claim as an intrusion and interference with them, and an injury done to their interests and peace. But bad as this is,—loaded with judgment as such a condition of soul must be,—unspeakably worse is it that he should "come unto HIS OWN," and his own "RECEIVE HIM NOT." Ignorance is bad enough, (not to know him who has inscribed his name on all the works of his hand,—his superscription being legible on every thing we call ours); but what shall we say to contempt shown to his message, to his offer of himself by all his servants in the gospel of his grace?

The claims of natural religion, how strong are they! "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard; their line hath gone through all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." What man of us can deny that he has been appealed to, in conscience and heart, by the riches of God's goodness in his works, experienced in ten thousand forms, ever since we came into being? Who can deny, though no other claim existed, that enough exists there to lay the soul under obligation to be to God what he has a right creatures endowed as we are ever ought to be? And if in these circumstances we refuse to "know him," if we "hide our faces from him," how shall we answer for it?

But if the claims of natural religion be strong, and leave the ungodly man without excuse, what shall we say of those

of revealed religion? In contrast to the testimony by the "WORKS" of God, it is declared: "His LAW is perfect, converting the soul,—sure, making wise the simple,—right, rejoicing the heart,—pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever." To us this law has been given; to us is the word of this salvation sent; ours is the "testimony of Jesus." He is revealed to us. We are baptized persons,—possessing the oracles,—enjoying the dispensation of the Spirit—in this sense in covenant. What more could have been done unto us? Surely Christ is entitled not only to our knowing and acknowledging him, as we inhabit his world, but to our receiving him as our Redeemer and portion for ever, as we enjoy his covenant! Entitled,—rather is it not the honour which befits the nature which he has given us, that we should be made partakers of that life of God which is in him, through the possession of which alone we can fulfil the high destiny originally intended for us? And are we not bound to set our hearts supremely on obtaining it? Shall we, then, make light of the offer of this gift? "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be ye horribly afraid." "Of what punishment shall they be counted worthy who tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of his covenant a common thing?"

THE GRACE OF CHRIST TO THOSE WHO RECEIVED HIM.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—John i. 10–13.

(Second Lecture.)

Having spoken of the treatment which Christ has always received in the world, as set forth in this passage, we proceed to consider the other truth conjoined,—a truth of equal importance, as referring to his testimony. It is a mournful thought, that all the offers, all the pleadings and solicitations, are upon Christ's side,—that he stands at the door, and knocks,—whilst all the refusals are on the part of sinners. By and by this state of things will cease,—the sure earnest of which is the promise given unto him of the Father, the righteousness of the thing itself, and the first-fruits which have already been gathered, and are ever being vouchsafed.

We speak now of,—

II. His grace towards them who did receive him: "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to

become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

The grace appears in his prevailing with those thus spoken of to embrace the offer made to them, and in what is implied in that,—in the special privilege which he bestows on them who receive him,—and in the spiritual change wrought in them, to which their accepting him is ascribed.

1. *The grace appears in his prevailing with those thus spoken of to embrace the offer made to them, and in what is implied in that.*

However true it may be that many within the visible church reject Christ, there are some who make him welcome. It has been so from the beginning, and is so still.

Wherever the gospel comes it is the candle lighted, that the lost piece of money may be searched out and found; or it is the shepherd on the mountains seeking the wandered, perishing sheep. The money, the sheep, is the property of the seeker—his by right; that which he is entitled to have in possession, and that, too, which shall not escape him. Such is the excellency of Christ's grace, exerted in saving them who are ready to perish, that though they who despise him be very numerous, even of the hardest-hearted enemies and aliens some are gained, —some are apprehended, allured, drawn, made willing,— and so they embrace him and become his. This proves true only among those who are described as "his own,"—that distinctive class—those, namely, who have the ordinances —those to whom are committed the oracles of God. The

same thing is not asserted of the class described by the term "the world." They "know him not." Even of the others, for the most part, the record is that "they receive him not." Nevertheless, *of them* there are some exceptions. Under the old dispensation,—in Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and David, and Jonah, and all spiritual men of the same character,—we have examples of those who embraced the promises, and received Christ when he came in the offer of the word. Under the new dispensation, all quickened, spiritual believers belong to the same family. To him their salvation in accepting him is to be ascribed. He has prevailed by his grace in them. That they have been "made to differ" has been wholly of him.

Now, there is implied in this, in the *first* place, that they welcome and receive Christ himself. Christ offers *himself.* The primary duty, or the first acting of true faith, is to accept himself,—not to accept the blessings and benefits which he brings, whether they be common gifts or the special favours bestowed on the redeemed. No doubt, when his person becomes the object of our acceptance, as we thus speak, it is not without the belief that all the good of his chosen shall be ours, nor is it without earnest desire and expectation that all may become ours. The saved soul, nevertheless, is not married to the portion which Christ brings, but to his person. The portion is precious, not independently of him, but only as it is conferred by him and with him. He comes unto "his own" in the manifestation of himself,—of his personal glory. This he does that he may be admired of his saints,—that they, contemplating him as the only begotten of the Father full

of grace and truth, may be attracted and won to love him for his own sake. Without this no right relation can ever be formed between the soul and the Saviour. To such as thus receive him, he gives the blessed privileges of his purchase.

It were but a poor compliment that the bride should value the bridegroom only or chiefly for the inheritance to which he raises her; that her affections should be bestowed there and not on his person; that all her expectations and associations should centre there,—he himself being but an appendage borne with for the sake of the benefits obtained through him. Yet very many there are who expect to be saved, their principle of hope being no higher than this. Personal union to Christ, and all that is necessarily involved in it, they would avoid. Whatever they may be willing to accept at the hand of their acknowledged Lord, they would avoid the alternative of establishing in his favour any claim over them of the same kind, or to the same extent, that he grants unto them. They would avoid worshipping him with their persons and their entire substance, yielding themselves unreservedly unto him. Whilst rejoicing to have him bound unto them, they decline to be bound by similar ties unto him. But the thing which they thus decline must be, and it uniformly does exist wherever Christ has by his grace induced souls to receive him. They have then become a "willing people." On no other principle can the vital union which carries the promise of everlasting life be formed. If, therefore, the supereminent excellency of Christ as the "head of every man" has not been seen by us; if he has not become to us

the "chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely;" if we have not "forsaken all" for him,—we are not yet of those who have felt his constraining grace, our case does not answer the description of the text, we are not worthy of him. It is one thing to say, "Lord, Lord," another to do the "will of our Father which is in heaven;" and this is his will, even that we should believe in him whom he hath sent.

But there is implied, *secondly*, in Christ's having prevailed, and won us to himself, that we exercise implicit confidence in him. They who receive him "believe in his NAME."

They have a right knowledge of him. There must be no mistake, there can be no mistake with safety, as to the person of Him whom they receive. Their Christ is not a being of their own imagination, but he is the Son of God who has been revealed in them. The recorded testimony referring to his proper glory is full, for the very end that no mistake may occur. All such knowledge of the object of their affections as is contained in the testimony by John in this chapter, they adopt and cherish: that in the beginning was the WORD, that the Word was God, and with God; that all things were made by HIM, whilst he is the instituted Heir of all; that he was made flesh to fulfil the counsels of the Godhead in the great scheme of redemption; and that, having triumphed in our nature, he has now with it ascended to the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. They rejoice in his character, as made manifest at the marriage of Cana in Galilee and at the grave of Lazarus; when he uttered his

parables and wrought his many miracles; when he spoke the words of eternal life as they never were spoken by man's lips; when he condemned the Pharisees and exposed their false pretensions, whilst he instructed his followers in all the mysteries of the kingdom. In one word, they accept and hide in their hearts the entire record of his life and death, of his resurrection and ascension,—of the whole previous humiliation, and of the entrance into glory which followed. All is sealed on their souls by the power of the Spirit,—by his teaching they know their Lord.

Let every man see to it that no error exist in his mind as to this feature in the character of those who have truly received Christ. How many imagine that they know him when they are ignorant of his true glory! How many suppose that they are married to the great Saviour, and are partakers with all others who really are so, when they are yet aliens and foreigners! What fearful discoveries of fatal mistakes will the morning occasion when it comes! To how many, then claiming this kindred, will Christ be compelled to say, "Depart from me, for I never knew you." Why should so tremendous an evil be in the end experienced? Why not now examine ourselves, and discover whether we be in the faith? Why not seek betimes, with the deepest earnestness of soul, to be truly in Christ, to be truly of them who know him?

Again, in the form in which Jesus is proclaimed in the gospel, his saved ones receive and believe in him. "*So* we preach, and *so* ye believed," saith the apostle.

There is a correspondence between the gospel and

faith of the same kind as between the seal and the wax to which the seal is applied. Faith is the communicated condition of soul which receives and appropriates that which the gospel makes known. Righteousness is revealed to it. Faith becomes thus an expression of the gospel. Receiving the impression of the truth,—more or less vividly according to its power and purity,—it indelibly retains the truth, and in its own office becomes the counterpart of the gospel. The natural mind receiveth not the things of God, more than water receives the impress of the seal laid on it. Believers only are described as "epistles of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart."

This is of great moment. Christ must be accepted in his own way and on his own terms. If not so accepted, there can be no true confidence in him. Here arises the difficulty. Too often his way and terms are declined because accounted severe and intolerable, as in the case of the young ruler, to whose taste negative religion, such as his religion was shown to be, might be palatable, but not the positive assumption of the cross,—the actual life of a follower of Jesus. He cannot alter the mode or ground of a sinner's acceptance,—the principles on which his relation to himself is to stand,—and he will not do it. Negociations, therefore, are often virtually broken off when apparently entered on,—it may be, as in the above case, with many painful compunctions and sad thoughts, but broken off they truly are; for the poor sinner cannot abandon his idols, he will not sacrifice the lusts of his

heart, and he so chooses destruction rather than life,—than that life which is in Christ, and which becomes ours only when we receive him as he is offered in the gospel.

He is offered sincerely, and he must be accepted with a corresponding state of soul. The counterpart of a sincere offer is a "faith unfeigned." No honesty or earnestness can be compared to that of true faith. The Saviour is offered in his entire glory, and he must be so accepted. In all his offices, and for the accomplishment also of the results of the execution of those offices, he is revealed to faith. The offices are undivided, and as undivided they must be welcomed. Christ is, therefore, received, not for mercy only, on the ground of his great atonement, but for all spiritual knowledge and all personal holiness,—for the full "perfection" appointed to them who are his. He is offered exclusively; not as if it might be partly Christ and partly ourselves, partly Christ's righteousness and partly ours, partly his strength and partly ours, but that he alone shall be the foundation on which our hope is built,—the nail fastened in a sure place on which all the glory of the house shall hang. Moreover, not to dwell on this, he is offered as a gift,—that which may not be purchased, and cannot be merited. They who have no money for such a purchase, are the parties called to make it? Unto the man "who worketh not, but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly," faith is counted for righteousness. In point of fact, therefore, they who "buy the gold tried in the fire," and who thus become rich, are the sin-convicted, "the wretched, the miserable, the *poor*, the blind, and the naked."

Then finally, there is the actual committing of our all to Christ when we receive him,—the casting of ourselves for every thing on him.

What is the saving act of faith? This is an interesting inquiry, and we have just spoken of it. There are three acts of faith, usually described by the terms assent, assurance, and acceptance. *Assent* is not, and cannot of itself be, the saving act of faith; for we may, in the exercise of our natural faculties without grace, give a satisfactory and sincere assent to the gospel. No doubt, assent is included in faith of a saving kind, but it is not, of itself, that faith. *Assurance* is not the saving act of faith,—it is not, indeed, of the essence of faith. A precious privilege and appendage of faith it is; that without which no believer can enjoy the good which mercy has conferred as the sovereign donor would have him to enjoy it; and without which, if his soul be lively, he can never be contented. But assurance is not the saving act of faith, for unquestionably a true believer may walk in darkness as to his own state; and, indeed, before a man can know and rejoice that he is a believer he must be one. Faith in our own faith may be a comfort, but it is not the act by which the soul cleaves to Christ and is delivered.

We say, then, that the act of saving faith is *acceptance.* It is receiving Christ on the authorised offer of the glorious gospel. It is looking to him, and seeing him with unveiled heart there. It is appropriating him for our own special purposes,—resting upon him as ours, on God's gift, for these purposes. He is meat, not

merely laid on the table for our use, seen, approved of, and desired by us, but that meat actually put into our mouths and eaten by us as our very life. By saving faith we go to him with every thing, we make ourselves his burden, (that which he rejoices to bear,) employing the entire revelation of his glory for our own use just because it is given for that very end,—and in this way enjoying forgiveness, adoption, peace, spirituality, with all heavenly blessings.

2. *His grace appears in the special privilege which he bestows on them who receive him.*

This, generally, is the condition of sonship,—they become the "sons of God." Such privilege or "power" he gives. All spiritual blessings are in Christ's hands, and it is with him to endow, according to his pleasure, those whom he gains. According to his own grace and good-will, he makes them what they become.

Those saved by him are by nature the children of wrath, justly exposed to the divine judgment; but in his person God is reconciled, and pacified towards them for all that they have done. In the condition in which they are given to Christ God is not content with them, and that justly because of their offence; neither are they content with God, and that unrighteously through the sin which reigns in them. But, won by Christ, so that they accept him, and repose their confidence on his love and faithfulness, not only is God at peace with them for his righteousness' sake, but they are now at peace with God,—the natural enmity is in so far destroyed, a sweet persuasion of the divine love is shed abroad in the heart, and

a sincere longing after conformity to the divine law is wrought in them.

Having reconciled them, he makes them "sons," "heirs of God," and co-heirs with himself. This he does, however, not as being a necessary result of reconciliation, but as a fruit of his sovereign will. There might be reconciliation without the high rank and dignity of "sons." That "adoption" he confers of his free grace. "Now are we the sons of God;" but it is of the spontaneous and independent gift of Him whom we receive. He betrothes his people to himself; he stoops to enter into the closest alliance with them, making them one spirit and one body with himself; and he exalts them by that course to their high rank. This "power," right, honour, privilege, they have of him, and in no other way.

Of him, also, is the comfort and enjoyment connected with the dignity of sonship. Mere elevation in rank does not necessarily imply comfort. We can conceive such elevation, on the contrary, proving the occasion of perfect wretchedness. In itself rank can secure no happiness in any instance; and in some circumstances, to those unused to its distinctions, it must of necessity produce the very opposite of satisfaction and consistent joy. But in the case of all whom Christ raises to the rank of sons of God, provision is made against such a result. As the "adoption" itself is the gift of his grace, so is that provision. With the rank he gives the "spirit of sons;" he sends this spirit into their hearts, and makes them intimate with the happy sensations ever therewith connected. As

the returned prodigal was made to feel that his father's house was his "home,"—as his heart was made to beat in unison with the hearts of all the worthy in that house,—so the redeemed of the Lord by his grace are attuned in all their convictions and affections to their new station. A state of distance from God no longer exists. Distrust and unbelieving diffidence pass away. They are made to know, in their inmost souls, that God has been to them a Father, and that he is so now. They cry, "Abba, Abba;" for they are no longer afar off, but brought nigh in Christ and by his blood.

How highly do they now esteem the dignity to which they are advanced! How earnestly do they desire to be conformed to Christ's image, whilst they blush and are ashamed at their shortcomings, trembling lest they should prove unworthy of the vocation wherewith they have been called! What a high meaning is there to them in that word, "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren"! And shall they not, then, so walk as to please God,—"as obedient children, not fashioning themselves according to the former lusts in their ignorance; but as he that hath called them is holy, seeking to be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness"?

He gives power to this effect. Precious Jesus! precious grace! precious fruit of that grace! That the heir of hell should be made an heir of heaven,—that the child of corruption should be made the subject of a divine nature,—that the dunghill should be exchanged for the seat of princes,—that heaven should even now be in the

heart, as the sure guarantee that it shall at last be held in full personal possession,—how great the gift! Is it ours? If not, why should we be destitute of it? He has not yet shut up his tender mercy. To as many as will now receive him he will give "*power* to become the sons of God."

3. *His grace appears in the spiritual change wrought in them who receive him, to which their accepting him is ascribed:* They are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

This change implies a new form of existence. It is a "*birth*,"—a new birth,—a resurrection,—a regeneration. Of the nature of the change thus announced, as inseparably connected with accepting Christ, we shall not at present speak at large. This much, however, must be stated: There is ever a quickening of the soul, at whatever time Christ comes and is accepted. There is an awakened attention,—a new interest and concern. It is as if life had visited the dead,—as if the things that were not had begun to be. It is a bursting open of prison doors,—an escape from heavy, death-like slumbers and feverish unwholesome dreams. All has become new. Only then is there a hand to take hold of Christ, and a real intention and effort to apprehend him; but then this does exist, and then, through his own grace, there is a true laying hold on him for salvation. Only then is there an appetite for the food provided for the soul, or the spiritual digestive functions suited to the nature of the food, by which it becomes profitable; but then both do exist: and as Christ in every instance when he raised the dead commanded that food should be given them, he here uniformly appoints

and bestows the support required by the quickened and living soul. Moreover, then only does the necessary sensibility to danger, and to the causes of danger to the new life exist; but then, how great that sensibility! Ere the new birth (this life from God) came, no such sensibility was known. No alarm was felt amidst exposure to spiritual evil the most imminent. The person, so changed now, could then go anywhere without question,—could be any thing or do any thing pleasing to his corrupt nature, not disturbed by thoughts of risks to which he subjected himself, or of spiritual evils by which he might be overtaken. But now it is no longer so with him. The living babe may have little strength,—little power to defend or protect itself,—feeble and more helpless than the young of any animal it may be,—yet what an instinctive sense of danger! what an instinctive shrinking from every thing which might injure the life of which it has become the subject! what a bitter wailing does it raise under biting cold or the slightest wound,—the intensity of life giving intensity to pain, and the cry being a pleading for help and for preservation of life! And what power has God been pleased to give to the cry! What emotions does it awaken in the mother's heart! what yearnings,—what efforts to heal, to soothe, to pacify, to comfort! How does that wail call into operation all the provision which the Creator has stored up in a parent's heart and in the affections of humanity, required for the preservation of life so exposed! Consider this, ye stout-hearted, who fear no sin and never tremble at God's word! who, if ye escape the lashes of a troubled conscience and threatened punishment, care not

for present spiritual injury, the decay of the soul, the absence of the image of God, and entire destitution of all qualification to enjoy him, and who neither know nor desire the consolations of his Spirit! Where the spiritual change implied in being "born" as the text speaks is known, there the action and sensibilities, the desires and hopes, the cares and anxieties, the joys and sorrows, of the spiritually alive are ever found. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature." If we are not "created in him" with such results, we are none of his.

The change thus spoken of is not by natural inheritance,—it is "not of blood." The birth to natural existence, and to whatever rank may attend natural life, is "of blood," of natural descent. The change of which John spoke, and to which he traced the glorious sonship of those who belong to Christ, is not by descent, even from godly progenitors. Grace is not propagated as natural life is;—a doctrine especially necessary for the Jews, and intended by the evangelist for them, boasting, as they ever did, that they had "Abraham for their father." Of natural birth he spake not. The doctrine is no less necessary for us, and it is intended for all who put confidence in any thing merely human, material, external. They who become sons of God do not attain to that exalted good "by blood." They may have come to much by that channel,—by human connections,—but to spiritual birth they have not so come; no man ever can.

Neither is this great change by the operation of the natural will,—it is not "of the will of the flesh." Its origin is not to be found in any determination or purpose proper

to ourselves, which has no higher source than man's own mind. A strong will is sometimes a great blessing: when directed on that which is good, it is a qualification of unspeakable value; but unsanctified and unrenewed, it is utterly without value in the matter of our salvation. Though on that great subject we may have strong inclinations under the power of natural principles, and form strong resolutions and strong purposes, and though we may attempt to act on them, never will the result be the change of which the text speaks. Some men's lives are made up of good resolutions and good intentions. It has been said that "hell is paved" with such material; but the state of mind therewith connected is not the "birth" of which John speaks. Whatever hopes may, for a time, be cherished of those who exhibit such symptoms of an awakened soul, where there is nothing higher than the human will in its unrenewed, corrupted condition, the change which is ever connected with the apprehension of Christ and the life unto God which follows, cannot be.

Once more, the spiritual birth is not the fruit of any superior endowments or acquisitions to which we may attain whilst still in our unrenewed condition,—it is not "of the will of man." As it is not of mere nature,—"the flesh;" neither is it of that nature under all the advantages of human culture,—not "of the will of *man*,"—not of man distinguished by qualifications justly esteemed in the world, whether they be the endowments of genius, of wisdom, or of learning. Even though distinguished in the very highest degree; though a man's character, the effect of natural capacity and of the careful and most successful cultivation

of natural talent, place him in the loftiest order of intellectual being, approaching that of angels, this is not the distinction to which our minds are here directed by the sacred record. Whatever the superiority of any man to all others, whilst he has not yet been "born," as we here read, he is destitute of what is essential to being in Christ and of Christ. This superiority can no more qualify him to act spiritually, and serve the living God, than dressing the literally dead in the clothes in which they were wont to be adorned in life and to appear amidst the gay and busy scenes of the world, can qualify them for the society of living men, or for the activities of our natural existence.

"Which were born," saith the evangelist, "*not* of blood, *nor* of the will of the flesh, *nor* of the will of man, BUT OF GOD." Regeneration is of God, by the office and operation of the Spirit. To him, therefore, and to his most blessed agency, the receiving of Christ by the soul is, in every instance, to be traced. He gives the "power" to become "sons of God" by uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling; and Christ gives the "power" by communicating himself through that agency. The word is the good seed. Ministers sow it. They are the servants of the Lord in that work. The Spirit glorifies him by receiving and exhibiting to the soul the things which are Christ's,—all truth which makes wise unto salvation through faith in him. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh,"—it can never be any thing else. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit,"—he produces the necessary change, none else can; when he does we apprehend Christ, and are made one for ever with him.

"No man can come unto me," said Jesus, "except the Father which sent me draw him." Behold how he draws! Consider in whom the saving efficacy resides, and to whom we are directed, that we may be made partakers of it! Shall we not seek it? Knowing the fountain of life, shall we not repair to it? Whatever our natural destitution of all spiritual ability may be, our need can be supplied there. Without that supply, be our profession and appearance what they may, we must die in our sins; and if we die in our sins, we shall certainly rise in our sins,—rise to be covered with shame and everlasting contempt. But why should it be so?

THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."—John i. 14.

The evangelist now speaks of the Incarnation. God had revealed himself, in the person of the Word, by the works of creation. He had done this, particularly, by giving life through him in various degrees; by infusing life into matter, itself naturally destitute of that property. More especially, he had revealed himself in him by connecting spiritual, divine, immortal life with matter,—constituting that form of being, so qualified that it might enjoy an endless duration.

After sin had introduced death and darkness,—after it had destroyed the work which thus especially manifested the glory of the Creator,—he was still pleased to make himself known in the person of the eternal Word; not now, however, as a faithful Creator, but as a gracious and mighty Restorer of what had been destroyed. Under various dispensations the method of this recovery, instituted from everlasting, was published; the great truth therein involved being intended to afford both to angels and to men the most glorious of all revelations

of his nature. Those dispensations had, accordingly, universal reference to the grand central event in the history of man, to speak of which John had now come. Whatever is to be seen of God in all his works, stupendously great though they be, nothing may be compared with the revelation of his glory in the "great mystery of godliness,"—in the arrangement of the covenant for the redemption of a lost world,—the advent in human nature of his only begotten Son.

In examining this passage, let us consider, I. *The connection between the evangelist's statement here and the preceding context;* II. *The incarnation itself;* and, III. *The abode of the incarnate* WORD *on the earth.*

I. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE STATEMENT OF THE 14TH VERSE AND THE PRECEDING CONTEXT.

The treatment given to Christ by mankind is the subject of that context. "He was in the world,"—after the entrance of sin and the usurpation of the great enemy,—in the world that was his, for he had formed it, and it could not for one moment exist without him,—but the "WORLD" refused to know or acknowledge him. It intentionally and studiously set him aside as not wishing to retain him in its knowledge. Moreover, when he had established a body distinguished by him in having conferred on them advantages peculiar to themselves, especially opportunities of access to and fellowship with him, so that, as compared with others, they were denominated "HIS OWN,"—a vineyard reclaimed from the wilderness, and provided with all that could make it rich and fruitful;

and when he came to them, justly expecting to be welcomed, "HIS OWN received him not." So it was generally, not absolutely, for some did receive him; all but universally, in past ages in the history of man, however, such was the mournful exhibition of human character and such the bitter fruit of sin.

This is the dark back-ground in presence of which the blessed statement of our text is placed. Such was the treatment which the great Lord of all received; yet the truth here related came to pass. The malicious hatred of the WORLD, and the unnatural ingratitude of the CHURCH, could not make void Christ's love for his people, —could not prevent his coming in compassion and pity for the redemption of the ruined, for the salvation of all the lost who had been given to him; as well as for securing temporal blessings, both to them and to others for their sakes, according as their need might be. There was enough (to use the language of men), in what he had met with, to cause him to abandon his purpose, but he did not abandon it. There was enough in the frightful exhibitions of corruption in the heathen world, and in the most perverse wickedness of the visible Church, both before and after the flood, down till the period of his advent, to make him determine to consign the whole family of man to the fate of those already in hell, to be "reserved in chains of darkness against the judgment of the great day." Had his thoughts been as ours, or his ways as ours, thus it might have been; but the heavens are not higher than the earth, than his thoughts and ways are higher than ours. The eternal purpose of the divine

counsel therefore was executed,—"THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH."

Nothing short of the SON OF GOD becoming the SON OF MAN to suffer in our nature, could avail to restore sinners at once to the favour and to the image of God,—to the rank and to the character of children of the Highest; and such was the divine love,—so was Christ's heart set on those given unto him out of the world,—that, in face of all the treatment he had met with, he came, that in the mystical union of the divine and human nature in his person, the foundation of reconciliation with God for perishing creatures of our race might be eternally established. "Herein indeed was love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." What meaning then, in this view, is there in the announcement that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" or, "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man should lay down his life for his *friends;* but God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet *sinners,* Christ died for us!"

II. THE INCARNATION ITSELF.

Here let it be observed, that the person of the Godhead who became incarnate was not the Father, and was not the Holy Ghost,—but the SON, the "WORD," the "WISDOM" of God.

There is a real distinction in the persons of the Godhead, so that the one is not the other. Each having a

proper manner of subsistence, the one might become incarnate and not the others. Therefore it was not the Godhead, simply considered, which was "made flesh," but the person of the SON subsisting in the Godhead. The SON—the WORD—"made the worlds." "He was before all things, and by him all things do consist." The SON—the WORD—also redeems all things. He undertakes the office of Mediator, being alone competent to do it, and is the "ONE Mediator between God and man." As he made all at first, he will restore all. As he gave the life which sin ruined, he will give, a second time, a better life. Again, and in lights of far more brilliant colours, he will exhibit the glorious image of God in the nature of created man, when he has at length accomplished all that he has undertaken in the everlasting covenant, and when grace has merged into the ripeness of heavenly glory. In this, accordingly, will be beheld a manifestation of God in the person of the WORD far more exalted than any that preceded it. "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made:" True. "In him was life:" True; and great was the display of the divine majesty connected therewith. "The life was the light of men:" True. But whatever the glory in all this revealed, the "glory which excelleth" is to be seen rather in the "*resurrection* and the life" of which he is the author,—seen not merely in his infusing life into matter, bestowing immortality in such circumstances, but in communicating life to the corruption of death, and making the very ashes of the furnace the stock and staple of a luxuriant

growth of all spiritual and heavenly undecaying blessedness.

It being understood, then, that the person of the SON, not of the Father or of the Spirit, was incarnate, we must observe that it is not said *he was flesh*, but he "was *made* flesh." The same truth is expressed in the epistle to the Hebrews, when the apostle says, "he *took on him* the seed of Abraham." Not that there was a change of the divine nature into the human. A grievous misconception it were to think that. Sometimes it is inconsiderately asserted, that he laid aside his glory, as if he had exchanged divinity for humanity. No; it was not so. The great mystery of the incarnation was realised, not by his changing what he was, but by his assuming what he was not. He clothed himself with humanity. He put on that veil. He appeared in that form. He partook of flesh and blood. Just as it is said, that "he *was made* sin," and that he was "made a curse," the meaning being that he assumed both, that they were laid on him, so here. There is no mixture or confusion of the natures of the ever-blessed Mediator. From eternity and unto eternity he is God; yet he became man by assuming humanity. His person is one, as it ever was from the beginning and ever shall be. His two natures are distinct although united in the one person,—that person (thus possessing both natures) being one with the Father and the Spirit in undivided Godhead. Through this mysterious and glorious arrangement he is an all-prevailing and sufficient Mediator. Other "day's-man" there can be none. Who but he can fulfil the conditions of so wonderful an office,

and stand between such offenders as sinners are, and the great God whom they have offended? Here we have the one fit vicarious substitute—the one sufficiently valuable sacrifice—for the guilty. Through the Eternal Spirit he offered himself up; and now the Church of God are they whom "God has purchased with *his own* blood."

Apprehending this truth, then, that the person of the SON (not of the Father or of the Spirit) is made "FLESH," in the sense of assuming it to his proper nature, let us consider what that is which is assumed as described by the term employed. "FLESH," obviously means the entire nature of man; that nature with all its essential properties. It means not a BODY merely, in the limited sense,—Christ's divinity being to it what the soul is to the body of an ordinary man: not that; but a true body of man, and a true soul of man: not "the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." In one word, it means a perfect nature of man,—nothing below, and nothing above that. The Scriptures afford abundant evidence that the term FLESH is so to be understood as employed here. It is not implied, however, that Christ's humanity consisted of the nature of man as corrupted by sin. With respect to that, he was "separate from sinners." He was a man, and the "Son of man." He existed not by a distinct creation, as Adam was formed from the dust of the earth; but he was the "Son of man," as "made of a woman," and thus literally was a descendant of ancestors distinctly traced in every link up to the first man. As Eve was not formed from the dust by a separate creation, as her case was different

from that of the man from whom she was taken, yet not but that she was truly "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," so with Christ. "Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh" he literally is,—a man, "the Son of man," and yet "separate from sinners:" not as we are by nature.

This great distinction formed part of the glorious arrangement in our redemption, that, as the Lord assumed humanity to his own essential and proper nature, he might also freely assume to that humanity its infirmities in its fallen condition,—infirmities not inherited by himself. The common infirmities of our corrupt nature he did accordingly assume. He took a mortal body: he was formed in the womb; he appeared in our world as a babe, being born as we are; he passed through all the stages of corporeal and mental development to the full maturity of manhood; the same time passed over him in this progress as in ordinary cases; and his course, from the beginning of his mortal existence, was onward to the grave. He knew hunger, and thirst, and exhaustion,—every monition that told of a sentence of death existing in him. His human soul also was subject to such affections as our souls know. Hope, and joy, and grief, and fear, moved and agitated him. In all these things "he was *made like* unto his brethren." As he was "made flesh," so he assimilated himself unto his brethren by assuming the infirmities of their fallen nature in body and soul, to be experienced by him in his spotless nature, in a nature incapable of being defiled or injured by them.

He did not, indeed, assume our personal infirmities.

It is of importance to distinguish these from our common infirmities. The seeds of decay which lurk in us may be cherished till they grow into rank and offensive disease. Thus the infirmities of body and soul sometimes become evils which, but for such wicked treatment, could never have existed even in us. Because of these, transmitted from generation to generation, human life suffers, in various forms, aggravations of wretchedness which otherwise should never have been experienced. Those personal infirmities the WORD made flesh took not. His nature, as we have said, was not liable even to the common infirmities, but he assumed them. The others he did not. The common infirmities of our fallen nature he assumed that he might qualify himself to be "a merciful and faithful High Priest,"—that he might know our frame in his own experience, and be able to have a fellow-feeling with us,—to sympathise, weep with, and succour us. Herein, indeed, was love; that he actually tasted death for his people, not merely in dying on the cross, but by making himself acquainted, in his flesh, with every painful emotion connected with the final fatal issue of mortality, whether in the dismal anticipation of its approach or the actual endurance of its doleful accompaniments; in one word, by bearing their infirmities, and partaking of the bitterness of them all.

And yet, let me ask, of what avail is it that Christ should have united himself to our nature,—that he should have made it one with his own,—if we are not united to him in our persons? Why is the blessed truth before us proclaimed, but that each of us for himself

should seek that union as a primary duty, the obligation of which the bare statement of our doctrine emphatically involves? Thus near does God come to us. He is in Christ, and makes public proclamation of the fact for great public ends. The duty which takes precedence of every other,—the neglect of which prevents the right performance of every other,—is the duty of closing with Christ, seeking this union to him, that as he "liveth by the Father," we should "live by him." For this he comes unto "his own;" and to as many of them as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe in his name.

Contemplate the honour which he intends for us. Judge of it by examining the mystery revealed in this portion of the Scriptures of truth. The foundation, when laid, tells, in some sense, what the character of the superstructure to be reared thereon is intended to be. Thereby you judge of the extent, the magnitude, the magnificence of the design of the Architect; even as also, when you trace the foundations of some ruined building, you judge what, in its perfect condition, its structure was. See, then, in the great truth before us, what God intends for redeemed sinners. Judge to what height of glory he purposes to raise them,—the foundation on which, as lively stones, they are to be built, being none other than the WORD made flesh! What will their future rank, dignity, and exaltation be, when by such a connection he makes them of his family, and restores them to his love? What blessed prospects does such a sublime truth open up to us! And can it be, that we shall overlook, or

neglect, or despise it? Can it be that other things shall hold such a place in our thoughts and hearts that this shall be lightly esteemed? If so, will not God be just when he speaks in wrath, and clear when he judges unto condemnation all who so grieve and provoke him?

III. The abode of the incarnate Word on the earth.

He did live in the world,—"he dwelt among us." The ingratitude and wickedness of man, however aggravated, could not prevent this. He dwelt among us long enough to afford abundant proof of the reality of his humanity both in body and soul; and long enough to sanctify the world as the place of residence of his redeemed people, during whatever period he may be pleased to appoint their abode in it, and to leave them there. He counted it good enough for himself, in his day, whilst it lasted; and he will have them to count it good enough for them in their day appointed according to his pleasure. Moreover, he dwelt long enough among us to fulfil the whole Scripture referring to the grand fact of the incarnation,—long enough to accomplish, in human nature, a perfect obedience to the divine law in its whole extent of demand, both in principle and detail,—long enough to make full atonement to divine justice in behalf of sinners, and also to destroy death and him that had the power of death, spoiling the principalities and powers of the kingdom of death and darkness, making a show of them openly as a triumphant victor; in one word, long enough to "finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make

reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness."

Competent witnesses saw his glory; though, when he abode among us, they saw it only in the form which he then adopted. They "beheld his glory." He dwelt in humanity as in a tent. He tabernacled therein; and they beheld his glory in that condition. Of old "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" in the wilderness. That "earthly" arrangement was the faint type of the great "heavenly" manifestation afforded in the WORD'S being made flesh and dwelling among us. He is the "minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man." He is the true place of assembly to which sinners may come; where they are to meet their God, and to have peaceful and blessed fellowship with him. Whatever of typical glory illuminated the earthly tabernacle, in the person of Christ the true glory, that which was intended to be revealed, is to be seen.

The tabernacle of his FLESH did not conceal his glory. All who saw him, indeed, did not see that glory. It was hid from the "wise and prudent," and was not known to the "princes of this world,"—to the learned in the law of Moses and in the institutions of that dispensation which then was ready to pass away. Without the eye of faith,—without that supernatural power essential to the apprehension savingly of supernatural truth,—they beheld not the glory of him who dwelt among them, and who had come to them as unto "his own." But it was revealed to "babes." "WE beheld his glory," said John speaking of himself, and of others like himself. The "brightness" did

shine through the veil. Whatever the meanness of condition chosen by him, in which to appear and dwell for a time here (and it was the meanest), it did not conceal his glory from the eye of faith; that faith which received the testimony of God in the Scriptures, the testimony also of the Lamb of God himself, as well as of his forerunner appealing to the Scriptures. If he lay a helpless babe in a manger, a companion of the brute creation, his first presentation to the world being there, a sign in the heavens attracted the eager attention of scientific, perhaps holy men, who, obedient to the voice which to them addressed itself from that influence, sought out the place to which this star guided them; and, not deterred by the unseemly condition in which they found him, offered up their royal sacrifice of gold, and frankincense and myrrh, at the same time that they prostrated themselves before his presence, and humbly worshipped him. If the family of whom, as to his humanity, he came, was so obscure, so little in the knowledge of men, that none were interested in forwarding the object for which they had performed their journey to Bethlehem, and no effort was made to serve them in the trying circumstances in which they found themselves unexpectedly involved, ANGELS were at hand to attest and publicly proclaim the honour that day conferred on the city of David, in the unnoticed event of the birth of Mary's first-born, the "Saviour, who was Christ the Lord." If he was reared far away from the seats of learning, and the highways of human fame; if infancy and childhood had passed and early youth had arrived, and the faith of Mary and

Joseph was all that existed in the world to do homage to the pledge of the unspeakable love of God in the gift of which they were the guardians, that obscurity, too, behoved to be illuminated, and even then he is seen "about his Father's business,"—a manifestation which Joseph and Mary might have expected,—disputing with the most learned of the doctors of the Temple, at once exciting their minds by creating desire for knowledge which they possessed not, and instructing them, as he only could, in that knowledge. If no man knew him when he was about to enter on his public ministry,—not even his appointed forerunner, who had but recently emerged from the recesses of the wilderness, to become the VOICE announcing the approach of one who coming after him was preferred before him, because he was before him; if even then, in his outward appearance, Jesus was no more than one of the many who in multitudes flocked to the Baptist, it behoved that the heavens should open, that an utterance should come thence, and that the Holy Ghost in bodily shape should descend and abide on him,—the celestial testimony being echoed on earth by the lips of him who, in the mechanic of Nazareth on whom he had just poured the water, beheld the "glory of the only-begotten of the Father;" and who, humbled under the sense of the majesty before which he stood, publicly professed that he was not worthy to stoop down and loose his shoe's latchet in whom that majesty appeared.

So was it, likewise, in every subsequent period of his life. Each successive miracle, from that at Cana onwards, in its own proper act, in the manner of its performance,

in the circumstances connected with it, and in the words spoken to the objects of his pity and most tender compassion, was just a vivid sparkle of his glory from under the veil by which it was covered. On the mount of transfiguration, within the cloud which rested there, connected with the voice from the excellent glory of that vision, how full was its manifestation! To that scene how precious was the recurrence, in all their after life, by them who had been made the eye-witnesses of his heavenly dignity revealed on that exalted occasion! Even amidst his concluding sufferings,—whether when the mob, headed by the traitor, came to seize his person, or when he stood before the Jewish and Roman authorities, or when he was stretched on the accursed tree,—deep as the obscurity became, it could not conceal that which it covered. When, at his presence, his pursuers sank overwhelmed to the earth; when, under such power of conscience as he never knew before, Pilate laboured for his release; when the malefactor by his side, on the heights of Calvary, became a subject of saving grace, and confessed him; and when the centurion, beholding the things which in that dreadful hour were evolved, declared his convictions,—all revealed what the prince of this world in vain would have had unknown. Verily the Son of God was there!

In vain did death separate soul and body, and was that body laid in the grave; in vain was the great stone rolled to the door of his sepulchre, the door publicly sealed, and the watch set to make all things sure against the possibility of fraud to be enacted by his followers, to perpetuate a deception by which (according to their

enemies) they had already misled so many. The circumstances of his resurrection, the ministering and attendant angels, the earthquake, the dismay of the guards, his appearing to his disciples, his abode among them for their assurance, confirmation, and instruction, for a limited time after he had risen, his ascension in their presence, and the vision vouchsafed on that occasion,—all, in like manner, proclaimed his dignity, and revealed the essential glory of the great object of their faith and worship. He could not be hid!

"We beheld his glory:" they saw that which could belong only to God, to the Son, to the Only-begotten, to him who truly was worthy to be the chief of their hearts! "WE beheld" it. This is the blessedness of the saints. They behold it now, and throughout eternity they shall continue to behold it. "We beheld" him full of grace,—full of love to mankind,—having in himself the whole remedy for the evil which sin has wrought and entailed; all this, to be by him gratuitously bestowed, in its completeness and fulness! "We beheld" him full of truth,—full of all light, purity, and unchanging faithfulness. In him, as they saw, shadows were fled away; all burdensome, unprofitable services had ceased,—the way into the holiest was at length clearly visible,—the veil was no longer on the face of Moses.

How necessary, dear friends, that we too should have eyes to see this great sight,—that the covering which rests on our hearts should be removed; for only when with open face we do behold this glory of the Lord are we changed into the same image!

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST.

"JOHN BARE WITNESS OF HIM, AND CRIED, SAYING, THIS WAS HE OF WHOM I SPAKE, HE THAT COMETH AFTER ME IS PREFERRED BEFORE ME: FOR HE WAS BEFORE ME. AND OF HIS FULNESS HAVE ALL WE RECEIVED, AND GRACE FOR GRACE."—JOHN I. 15, 16.

CREATION, with all its wonders, is one manifestation by which God has been pleased to make known the glory of his nature. Redemption, with all its mysteries,—the redemption of this lost world,—is another. In the latter, he is seen leaving the *ninety and nine* for a season, that the strayed and ruined *one* may be sought out and restored. All his works praise him; but "God manifest in the flesh," the WORD incarnate to accomplish the eternal purpose of divine love towards sinners of the human race, to deliver and restore the lost, is the work of all others which praises him most.

The evangelist having brought us to this point by his statement in the previous verses of the chapter, proceeds to confirm his doctrine by adducing the testimony of John the Baptist. This testimony extends from the 15th to the 36th verse, and embraces four subjects. The first of these is contained in the words now before us along with the two following verses, and consists generally in a testimony to the excellency of Christ, asserted in the manner here set

forth,—viz., by declaring, I. *His superiority to John himself;* II. *His superiority to all believers;* III. *His superiority to Moses;* and, IV. *His superiority to created intelligences* of every name.

In the present lecture we speak of the first two.

I. Christ's Superiority to John the Baptist.

John's public ministry was prosecuted for a considerable period before that of Christ began. The locality in which he fulfilled his mission was the "wilderness of Judea, and all the region round about Jordan." Thither the people of that district of country, as well as the inhabitants of Jerusalem, attracted by his fame, gathered to hear him. Multitudes, confessing their sins, were baptized into his doctrine, and thus publicly professed their adherence to it. The season was apparently one of much power from on high,—a season of deep convictions and solemn repentings. John's doctrine, accepted so cordially by his disciples, had exclusive reference to the great object of faith. It was all of him who was about to appear. It foretold his advent, and announced it to be at hand. It instructed sinners of every name to place no confidence in any outward privilege whatever,—neither in the Baptist's baptism, nor in their relation to Abraham,—but to seek the baptism of him whose appearing he taught them to expect, as the great issue of all past divine procedure, and whose baptism only could prove to them the salvation which they required,—a salvation to meet actually at once their need, and the convictions of that need which were wrought in them.

At length Jesus discovered himself. As an individual of the ever-increasing multitudes of the Baptist's congregation, he appeared at Jordan, and presented himself, like others, to be baptized into John's doctrine as one who devoutly adopted it. The glory of his person was then revealed to his great Forerunner. John had eagerly looked for this, and now the appointed time had come. Can we wonder that, under solemn conviction of his own unworthiness, and a sense of the need of those blessings of grace which Jesus alone could confer, he should have declined towards him the ministry solicited at his hand? "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" was the language in which, with deep humility, he expressed his declinature. But "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," answered the objection; "and he suffered him." Then immediately was witnessed, amid the Saviour's prayers, the scene of the Spirit's descent, in bodily shape like a dove,—and was heard the testimony from heaven to assure John, and all men, that "God's beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased," was at length *manifested* in the flesh. Moreover, then the Spirit's office in the Saviour for his public ministry forthwith began. His Anointed was, without any interval, led by him into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil, and to enter on that course of deep humiliation, trial, and suffering, which ended only on the cross.

At this point our evangelist takes up the history. As soon as Jesus had been publicly consecrated to his great undertaking, and was departed to enter on his dread con-

flict with the Enemy who had the power of death,—"John," continuing his ministry, "bore witness of him, and cried, saying, This is he *of whom I spake*, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." Sent to be a witness, to bear witness of the Light, he, in such terms, faithfully fulfilled his high commission.

It is to be observed that, in employing the language which he did, John refers to and repeats previous testimonies, applying them to him whom the people had just seen depart from the congregation under such marvellous circumstances:—"*This* is HE of whom I spake unto you." The Preacher did not deal in generalities, nor leave the people to draw conclusions, and make application of his doctrine for themselves, for he said distinctly, his eyes fixed on Jesus, and his hand, as we may believe, extended towards him—"THIS is He." Moreover, "HE CRIED." The Preacher himself was evidently moved in his inmost soul (how could it have been otherwise?) when with deepest earnestness of spirit he announced this Jesus of Nazareth to be the great Saviour of the world—the long-promised and long-expected Hope of Israel. The trumpet of Jubilee was in the Baptist's hand, the acceptable year had come; and he was sincerely intent that no uncertain sound should be uttered. His was the proclamation of healing to broken hearts, deliverance to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and liberty to them that are bruised. Those whom he described as a generation of vipers stood before him; those whom he had led to

reflect on the grace by which even they had been "warned to flee from the wrath to come;" and now, with additional warning that they should not, at this crisis of high vital privilege and opportunity, begin to say within themselves, "We have Abraham to our father," he directed their faith exclusively to him whom they had just seen set apart to his great work. With this he conjoined the call that they should bring forth fruits worthy of repentance,—such fruits as would stand his searching trial, with whom, as they had seen and must have learned, they had now to do.

Many discordant noises, no doubt, now prevailed among the vast gathering of human beings whom John addressed, but that did not deter him. Many conflicting views must have existed as to the doctrine to which they listened. The tumult of murmurers ever grew, we may believe, as the servant of the Lord continued to utter himself in the same strain. Men shut their ears and made their necks stiff. Prejudice, the lust which is in the world, and the love of sin, produced their proper effects. With all these he had to contend. He did so, persisting in his testimony, and he had his reward. The resistance to truth has ever been the same: in John's case it was not more than it has been in that of all who have served the same master, in the same cause, in every age of the world. If, then, boldness, fearlessness, fervency, fidelity, distinguished his entire bearing towards his hearers,—if there was no preaching for the fashion, or to please men, but only that by which sinners might hear the word of God in truth, and be thereby saved through faith,—so ought it to be in every

instance. By such conduct only, on the part of ministers, can there be the right exhibition of the glory of the Son of God; and they are safe only when their testimony of Jesus is so full, precise, and true, that they can confidently say, "This is he, in vain shall you look for another."

The substance and form of the Baptist's testimony were,—that though Jesus was "after him" as to the time of his nativity, and the period of his entry on his public ministry,—as to his being baptized by him, and as having hitherto been more obscure,—yet he was truly "before" him as to the dignity of his person, as to his office of Mediator, but especially as being the Eternal God,—"before" him as he is "before all things, for he made all things, and by him all things do consist." This had ever been his testimony, both before Jesus came to be baptized and after. From the first he had proclaimed him to be the HEAD, and he did no more now. "I indeed baptize you with water," he cried, "but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable."

Ministers never require to change their tidings of Christ. If they commend him according to his own word, holding with steady hand that lamp of truth, when he manifests himself it will be seen that all that was said of him was true. Nay, it will be acknowledged by all who have eyes to see

him, that the half was not told them of his excellence and glory. Or if he at any time obscure himself, as when he departed from the banks of Jordan to be hid for a season in the recesses of the adjoining dreadful wilderness of temptation, there will be no occasion to alter the terms or spirit of our declarations concerning him. There will be no reason, at any time, or under any such temporary obscuration, to say, "We thought it had been he;" we thought that of him such and such great things had been true. He has withdrawn his personal presence from the Church on earth now, and it is a time of obscuration in that sense to us. He is in heaven, and heaven must receive him until the times of restitution of all things. But we need not, in bearing witness of him, change one jot or tittle of all that was ever spoken. How sublime and exalting the emotion of the Forerunner, with his natural eyes beholding the revealed Messiah, and contemplating in him the perfect fulfilment of all the Scripture which he had expounded, as he declared the approaching accomplishment of the word in a form of which his hearers had never dreamt,—when he could make his appeal to all their past recollections and to all their present convictions of what he had spoken, and say, "This IS he of whom I spake unto you!" And what a time full of ecstasy will it be for ministers who, in their day, shunned not to declare all the counsel of God, who were faithful in all that they ever uttered of the truth referring to their glorious Lord,—when, with their flocks, standing in presence of the Judge to whom they shall have to give account, they are able to appeal to them and

demand if this be not he of whom they had spoken! Well will it be for all ambassadors that they are then in a condition so to profess and so to appeal. Mournful, on the other hand, it must prove for ministers and hearers together, when the Saviour seen in his glory shall be to them unknown; shall then, for the first time, come on their view in his glorious majesty,—a majesty which they ever before either declined to contemplate or despised; mournful when he pronounces on them a doom which no professions of knowledge or of love can then avert!

The divine arrangement in the Church, that there should be ministers to make public proclamation, and to testify of Christ, is ever to be respected. Could not the Great Head, the "Word made flesh," have appeared without John the Baptist? Could he not have been made known to men without his ministry, and have been "manifested" through some other agency than his "voice"? Undoubtedly he could; but John was the ordinance of God, and any instrumentality of mere human device would not have been so, and could not have been glorifying to him. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?" Such is the necessity which the ordinance of God, and God himself in the ordinance, create. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" said Saul, trembling and astonished in the presence of him whom he had been persecuting, but whom he now acknowledged as "over all God blessed for ever." Christ could have told him with his

own lips,—and what a teacher would he have been had he done so: but he did it not. The ordinance of God existed, and was not to be superseded. "Arise, go into the city, and it shall be told thee there what thou must do." How could Saul believe without a preacher, and how could any one preach to him unless he were sent? Behold Ananias a preacher like John,—"sent" also like him,—both being types and examples of the sacred institution of a preached gospel, which ever has been and ever shall be honoured of God!

It is for them who preach to have a due appreciation of their vocation,—to bear in mind that its object is to exalt Christ above themselves, to exalt him in the highest. What jealousy ought they ever to feel of any thing which might interfere with this primary end! They are under solemn obligation to stand on their guard against aught, whether in doctrine or practice, however plausible, which might intercept or obscure the view of the Lord's glory, or put honour on any thing as competing with him! The "apostle of our profession" was preferred before John, as he is "preferred before" all teachers of his truth. No agent in the Church, whether angelic or human, is to be put in comparison with him. In our nature, and by virtue of his personal union with us, he is Head of angels. It is their glory to hold to Immanuel the relation which they do, in being by him secured in the eternal, unchangeable possession of all their blessedness. And if so, is he not ever to be exalted by us,—are we not ever to defend his honour,—to see that none injure it? Behold how John magnifies his name! All men look to himself, and doubt

whether he be not the expected Messiah; but he points to Jesus, and declares that HE "is preferred before him, for he was before him." Holy apostles, too, uniformly magnify him! To do this was their very life. And, indeed, the desire to do it, the aim to do it, is the true test of grace reigning in the soul. Where this is, Christ's word and Christ's authority are ever made supreme and paramount.

II. CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ALL BELIEVERS.

John declares the relation which subsists between Christ and his people, from which his superiority inevitably follows: "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."—(Ver. 16.)

All fulness demanded for the wants of believers,—the entire supply of their need,—is treasured up in Immanuel. This might be asserted on the ground of his essential and eternal supremacy as the WORD,—one with the Father and the Holy Ghost. In him, in this view, the fulness of the Godhead dwells. He is, on that account, the fountain of all the good which can flow to any of his creatures. But the same is also to be asserted of him, looking to his derived glory,—that which belongs to him in his subordinate capacity of Mediator,—not the WORD simply, but the WORD MADE FLESH. The Father giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him, but in all his fulness. Every gift, every grace, every endowment required by those who are to be saved, and who are to be conducted to heavenly glory, resides in him. And the instituted relation which subsists between him and his people is that

of entire dependence on their part, and abounding gratuitous rich supply on his. They are his, not to give any thing, but to receive all. He is their reservoir,—their storehouse: of his fulness they all receive. It has pleased God, in great mercy, not to entrust to us the stock of grace which, in his sovereign love, he confers. Adam's fulness in the first covenant, was in his own hands both for himself and for us. Now, the fulness of the redeemed is in the keeping of another Adam. As that has been provided by him,—by his merits only, as accomplishing the will of the Father,—so it has pleased the Father that by him it should be preserved. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,—the whole abundance of grace, as well as the gift of righteousness, which the case of lost sinners requires,—so that he is a source of good which abounds towards them, in all that his own precious blood has purchased. Daily, and all day, they seek unto him, receive at his hands, and draw from his inexhaustible plenty; and thus in them is fulfilled his promise: "He that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

What, then, has any believer that he has not received? and from whom has he received what distinguishes him but from Christ? By nature, and of himself, the believer is empty. The very choicest of Christ's servants are so. Whatever they have become can be the occasion of no self-gratulation, the subject of no vanity. To them it belongs to think humbly of their gifts and qualifications, for these are not theirs, but another's. Whether the en-

dowments which adorn them be those of apostles, or those of prophets, or those of believers without name in the Church on earth, of high or low degree,—all has been received at the hand of Christ. His love, his wisdom, his bounty, are exclusively to be acknowledged and adored. No flesh is to glory in his presence. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

How exalting to the Saviour the truth, that all, from the beginning, have received all things from him, and do still continue to receive! Angels, saints, men of every station, have ever been his debtors; yet he abideth the same, as unexhausted and unexhaustible, as if no draft were made on his fulness. As the sea is not diminished by the treasures of rain which it yields, and which are dispensed to the earth to fertilise and refresh it,—or as the sun is not wasted, nor rendered less brilliant, or less capable of exerting his glorious influences, that he has imparted light to all past generations of men; so Christ has not been affected in his fulness, though from him has proceeded all the good that has ever been bestowed on every creature. That in the beginning he laid the foundations of the earth, and that he then spread forth the heavens like a curtain, has not diminished his strength. That he brought into being all the families of life, in their innumerable and varied forms, has not exhausted his resources. That the same power which created has ever been exerted to preserve and govern, has not wearied him. They whom he

has made to inherit eternal life, shall enter upon and for ever enjoy that glorious destiny. What he has formed to serve a temporary purpose,—to constitute the platform and scaffolding to the more enduring erection,—when that purpose has been accomplished, shall pass away. These things shall perish. Like a garment worn out by protracted use, they shall wax old. Like a vesture, whose day is done, he will then fold them up, lay them aside, and change them. But he himself remaineth. He is ever the same ; and his years shall not fail. His eye does not grow dim ; his ear dull ; nor is his arm shortened. Do we rejoice in his unsearchable riches, and in our relation of absolute dependence on him?—in that relation to our Head? We cannot, unless the truth which testifies of him be embraced. Faith in the testimony is essential to such a state of mind. O! to be exercising dependence. As vitally alive to the fact that such is the blessed relation in which we stand to him whom we call Lord, let us ever acknowledge it and adore!

Whatever is received by believers comes of grace,—of Christ's grace. It is not of merit. If you ask what is "grace,"—what the nature of the blessing so described, —we answer, the free favour of God, and the rich effects of that favour, imparted partially during the life which now is, but extending to the remotest eternity. This "grace" is Christ's "fulness."

Passing by other things : looking at what we require as lost and perishing sinners, it is MERCY. Mercy is the provision for misery ; and mercy in Christ Jesus is the provision of the everlasting covenant for the misery of

this lost world. It is forgiveness, adoption, unchanging acceptance of our persons, holiness begun growing on to perfection, support, preservation, final perseverance, and the glories of heaven at last! With respect to all this, Christ is God's "unspeakable gift!"

Need we wonder that the sin which grieves Jesus above all other sin is the sin of refusing this gift, whilst we feed on and enjoy the common bounties of his providence,—a providence which he exercises in subservience to his high and most blessed object of making us partakers of himself personally, and of all good in him! What provocation must be involved in the intensity of thought, and affection, and activity, devoted to the pursuit of things which he confers as freely and bountifully on us as he clothes with their beauty the flowers of the field, or fills with their necessary food the young ravens when they cry to him, whilst the "kingdom of God and his righteousness" are neglected, or have but a poor, secondary place assigned them! Let us fear the snare of so heinous a transgression. Let us not so labour for the meat which perisheth. That "meat" is indeed of divine goodness, and praise is due on its account; but it is not intended to be our portion, for it is not enduring. A temporary purpose is served thereby, and that accomplished, it is "meat" no longer. It has perished with the using; so that if we possess no better portion when we quit the body, eternal destitution shall begin,—the excruciating sense of it, ever increasing, shall then be felt; the hunger and thirst that shall never be satisfied; the worm which shall never die; the fire that shall never be quenched.

They who receive the true grace from Christ will be receiving grace after grace. If ours be merely the portion of plants or beasts, it will soon be done. "All flesh," in that view, "is grass, and as the flower of grass." The wind passeth over it,—it perisheth, and is no more found. Decay and death are sure and speedy by an unalterable law. From the flesh nothing can be reaped but corruption. Not so is it when the true grace is implanted in our souls. Then constant and unceasing additions are made. The "Author and Finisher" of the saving work in the soul having once imparted grace, gives more and more! As sure as the first supply comes, more will come, and more for ever! There is an increase without end; for what is glory even, but grace in its heavenly condition, heavenly proportion, and heavenly progress? Some plants run through their whole term in a single day, and then die. Others survive for centuries—like the trees of Lebanon—but they die. They had progress, increase,—many a summer's sun shed its vigour on them imparting influence, and many a winter torrent drenched them with its floods,—generation after generation contemplated their graceful forms, and rejoiced in their grateful shadow,—but they died! The plant of saving grace never dies. It grows for ever,—of God, it grows for ever,—of his sovereign, his irresistible appointment, it grows for ever. In this lies the explanation of a mystery so sublime. Grace may be as a grain of seed which requires the power of the spiritual microscope to discern it, or it may have become as the stately umbrageous tree, in which the fowls of the air find their shelter,—it is alike of

God, of God in Christ, of his free favour. He forms the minute seed, and he causes the full development. The first conviction which pierces the heart, and which is the very beginning of the change that results in our accepting Christ for all, and in our obtaining the high place before the throne in which that ends, are alike of God,—the history is recorded in these words, "grace for grace."

Moreover, the parties of whom we speak, receive grace corresponding to that which distinguishes Christ himself,—in that sense, too, it is "grace for grace." Because grace dwells in Christ, they receive it: his people are included with himself in all that endows him as their Head, through the love of the Father: the channels are full because the fountain overflows. But they receive grace corresponding in its nature to that which is poured on Christ. The channels cannot be filled with what is not in the well. The veins can have the life-blood only which circulates from the heart. The grace of the glorious Mediator is the grace which endows each of them whose names are written on his breast and on his shoulders. As he is, so are they,—each in his own degree. This is their glory, their dignity, their joy! They are sealed by his Spirit; and as wax receives the very image of that which impresses it, so do their souls receive the likeness of Christ,—"grace for grace,—from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is said that each leaf of a tree bears a resemblance to the tree itself. When winter has dropped the leaf from the parent stem and wasted its substance, when nought remains but the skeleton and its fibrous tissue, hold it up between you

and the clear sky, compare it with the tree on which it grew, you find the very image of the parent stem from which it derived its nature. When we shall see Him we shall be like him. Now we are like him, then we shall be clearly seen to be so; for all that is earthly shall have gone from us. Grace shall have done it,—"grace for grace."

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST.

FOR THE LAW WAS GIVEN BY MOSES, BUT GRACE AND TRUTH CAME BY JESUS CHRIST. NO MAN HATH SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME; THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, WHICH IS IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER, HE HATH DECLARED HIM."—JOHN I. 17, 18.

THE first part of John Baptist's testimony includes the four points which have already been enumerated:—*Christ's superiority to John himself,—his superiority to all believers,—his superiority to Moses,—and his superiority to all created intelligences.*

The first two have occupied us in the preceding lecture. We now advance to the other two.

I. CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO MOSES.

John had just testified of Jesus as the treasure-house of his people. He is their HEAD, as being the source—the meritorious cause and guardian—of all the good of which the children of God can now, or for ever, be put in possession. He is the ocean from which their supplies of every kind are obtained—supplies conveyed to them by the clouds which God makes his chariots; he is the sun whence all their light emanates—whether it be that which now shines on them, or that in which they shall walk in the

ages to come, world without end. "Of his fulness have all they received, and grace for grace."

Speaking as John did, in his public preaching, to Jews —and perhaps to many of the rulers—it was natural for him to conceive that their minds should immediately revert to their great Moses. Amidst the suppressed hum of voices in that vast multitude, though drowned by the lofty sound of the proclamation which he was so emphatically enunciating, he might have casually overheard the mention of Moses' name, his ear might have caught the scarcely restrained objection that Moses did not surely receive of Christ!—that he at least was an exception, though to all other servants of God, Christ might be superior! In the words of the 17th verse we have the reply to this objection,—whether it had been already expressed by his hearers, or was then only in their thoughts, or whether it might at any future time be suggested to them: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Moses indeed held a high place: "the law was given by him." This was that which constituted his great distinction—the honour which God put on him as a servant in his house. He was the mediator in whose hands the law was at Sinai placed by the "disposition of angels," those agents employed for that end on that august occasion. The Law had been in the world before Moses,—the Moral and the Ceremonial Law too. God's great commandments—the duty which we owe to him—the duty which we owe to our fellow-creatures—had not been concealed from men until the times of Moses. Cere-

monial ordinances, moreover,—typical shadows to make Christ, the Lamb of God, known for salvation, to be the means of offering him to sinners, and of communicating him with all his blessings to them,—had not been withheld till the times of Moses. Both had been given previously; and there had been precious fruit of both to the praise of God's grace. But the perfection of the legal system did not come till the times of Moses;—then, however, that system was completed, and by him it was inaugurated. By him God gave the LAW, in the form in which it was to fulfil for the world ALL that it should ever be capable of accomplishing. Moses was a great servant of the Lord in that dispensation. No prophet was like unto him. Of all who ever had been commissioned by God, none held the same place,—a truth which he was virtually directed to record when he foretold the advent of the "Prophet like unto him," of whom he was himself only a dim prefiguration.

Nevertheless, in the right view of it, no comparison could be made of Moses with Christ. The Law was given by him, "but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ!" Moses fulfilled his office; so did the angels, the messengers of the Sovereign Lawgiver; so also did the trumpet, whose sound waxed louder and louder, with the accompaniment of the thunderings and lightnings. All this had its special glory, and served the end to which it was ordained. But altogether of another kind was the glory belonging to Christ, the glory which the Baptist announced of him.

"Grace and truth" had been in the world from the

beginning. Of their fruit men in every age had been made partakers. Thousands, at the very moment when John was thus discoursing of Him who had departed into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, surrounded the throne in heaven through "grace and truth." Thousands, and tens of thousands more, until the grand consummation came, should continue in the same way and on the same ground to pass into that glorious presence, to dwell for ever with the Lord: while except as the result of the "grace and truth" by Jesus Christ, not one could ever have been or should ever be there. But by the law, in whatever sense understood, or at whatever time published—by the law given by Moses—the law, the testimony of God—by the law in itself—no individual from the beginning of time had gone to glory, and none till the end of time should ever go. Its place the law unquestionably had,—that of a handmaid, a schoolmaster, a servant in some form, to conduct to Christ. But his "grace and truth" only, ever had been and ever shall be the grateful source of every essential blessing which may be enjoyed by the children of men.

1. If we understand the law as meaning the exhibition to us of God's will, and the claim made on us for righteous obedience due to him,—its object and effect, when applied by the Spirit, are to give the knowledge of sin, to convince of sin, so to convince of sin in its guilt, pollution, danger, and misery, as to deprive us of all hope: under the law's power we die. It can do no more for sinners: but in doing *that* it does what is required in regard to the further procedure of God in showing us his mercy; a thing,

however, which in itself is not salvation, as a sentence of death is not life. For such an end the law was given. It is a part of God's message to sinners, when he addresses them with a view to their escape and deliverance: it "entered,"—it has its place in the Gospel dispensation,—"that the offence might abound," and so abound as by its convictions to overwhelm the soul. The effect of the law given by Moses at Sinai was to make the people feel that they were under wrath. Death looked out and frowned upon them from every appearance exhibited on the mount, as it threatened in every sound which was heard there. The experience under the law was that of mortal agony, the terror of impending destruction. "Speak thou unto us," said the conviction produced by it, addressing Moses, "and we will hear, but let not God speak unto us lest we die." Virtually, the cry was one beseeching a day's-man,—some mediator to stand between them and Him who spake unto them: in being such a cry, it was the type of the universal effect of the law, when it comes in power, and is heard as a part of God's message. The conclusion, therefore, is irresistible, "By the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified;" the conviction of which truth forces from the awakened the exclamation, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"—"what shall we do to be saved?" All the more is this true, that when the law does its appointed work, "sin revives." There is then an embittering of the natural mind and natural conscience, by which the motions of sin are augmented. The effect is like the dust flying about before the sweeper, which forthwith obscures and defiles every thing,

though it had been at rest and apparently harmless till so stirred. Or, 'tis like the evil savour, which the putrid mass sends up under the fierce, though pure, heat of the orb of day,—a savour latent and undiscovered till that power operated. The sun in the heights of the firmament is not certainly the source of the noxious savour, though he is the occasion of its discovery; neither is the law evil, or the origin of our wickedness, when it comes in power, though it makes that wickedness manifest. Therefore, though "alive" when the "commandment" had not come, being come, and sin having revived, we "die." Our hope, looking to the law, perishes,—the soul is in distress,—"the pains of hell take hold on us, and we find grief and trouble." The law, I repeat, does this, and can do no more for the sinner. To give the knowledge of sin, to make the offence abound, has been its commission: this it executes, and so leaves us. We then stand full in view of the mount which burns with fire, and within deafening proximity to the voice of the trumpet which thunders from its summit.

The provision to meet this sad condition is the "grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ." Nothing can relieve the awakened soul, and nothing is intended and appointed to relieve it, but the provision of the covenant, and accepting that provision by a living faith. Nothing can lay the dust, so that it may be cleansed away, but the sprinkling of the blood of the covenant. Nothing can remove the offensive and unwholesome putridity of our native corruption,—can neutralise, nullify, and absorb it, but the power of Christ. Through Jesus we acquire

confidence towards God, so that we seek unto him, "obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in our time of need." The law proclaims the curse; but "grace and truth by Jesus Christ" meet it. The law pronounces sentence of death; but he bestows life for evermore. The law genders a bondage which in its nature is intolerable; but he introduces us into the enjoyment of a glorious liberty,—the liberty which constitutes the happy distinction of all the sons of God. Through his "grace and truth," law-condemned sinners are freely accepted, freely justified, freely sanctified, freely glorified! Such is the excellency of Christ as compared with Moses: he is before him!

2. If we understand the Law as meaning "the shadows of good things to come,"—"not the heavenly things themselves, but the figures of the true,"—then, also, the inferiority of Moses to Christ is very clear.

Moses, in his person and office, was a type of Christ,—eminently so. In this character he appeared in presence of the people, a veil, emblematic of the dispensation which God honoured him to introduce, being thrown over his face. In Moses, speaking under the veil, they saw Christ; they saw him, but not with "open" or unveiled face. The provision of the covenant,—the "grace and truth" which are by Jesus Christ,—was made known, only however in this dark, shadowy, and imperfect form. The grand truth of the way of salvation was but obscurely revealed,—was but sparingly set forth,—under most burdensome and carnal ordinances, ordinances constituting a yoke which the church could not bear, and the removal of which its

prosperity imperatively demanded. It was the only form, indeed, in which (such was man's condition) Christ could be made known, before he actually came in the flesh,—sin and the hardness of the human heart creating a necessity so sad. A better day was to arrive,—a day when that which was but in part should be done away; but, meanwhile, the purposes of mercy were served amidst the dim twilight of the less glorious time.

In Christ the veil is removed. This truth the Baptist's testimony, in the words before us, virtually proclaimed. The axe was now laid to the root of the tree of carnal ordinances, and it was about to disappear for ever. John himself, though chiefly an Old Testament prophet, did not appear in the Temple, or exercise the functions of a public teacher within its precincts. Though, as the son of a chief priest, he was entitled to his place there, he took no place among the "princes of this world." The wilderness of Judea, the region round about Jordan, he chose as the scene of his great ministrations. In performing them he offered up no carnal sacrifices, he wore no ephod nor priestly garments. His food was not that appointed for priests; for he lived on locusts and wild honey. Personal ornaments he wore none,—not the golden crown, nor the pure white or gorgeously dazzling robes,—for his raiment was of camel's hair. His was not the dumb labour of slaying beasts, flaying and burning them, with all the burdensome ceremonial of that service; but it was living, ceaseless, earnest, impassioned preaching,—the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." John stood between the Old and the New Testament

dispensations,—the last of the officials of the former, who were commissioned of God; the first of the latter; or the very latest connected with the system which had waxed old, and was ready to vanish away,—sent to foretell and proclaim the spirit and glory of that which was to succeed. The "veil" was no longer to be on the face of Moses. That which "was made glorious" was now to have no glory, "by reason of the glory that excelleth." "Plainness of speech" was to supersede what was about "to be abolished," that the liberty which the presence of the Spirit brings might be fully enjoyed.

When Christ entered on his great work he too ministered in *preaching* the kingdom. They whom he sent did the same. There was an end of the veil. The old ordinances were set aside as the medium of communication between the throne of heaven and the souls of men on earth. From the hour when Christ gave up the ghost on the cross till this day, as it shall ever be, onward unto his second coming, those channels were thoroughly dried up. Thenceforward the Spirit came through the Gospel and its ordinances. They were made the medium of communication. As the Gospel caused the mystery of God in the great work of human redemption to be known, as it sounded forth his glory in the person and work of the Son, so the Spirit employed the Gospel only. It became his sword, the instrument of his power,—that by which he destroyed sin, communicated salvation, and wrought faith, with holiness and comfort.

Thus, in whichever way we understand the term "Law," —the law said to have been "given by Moses," the law

in either of the two senses of which we have spoken,—"grace and truth by Jesus Christ" is the contrast to it; and a contrast of such a character as to establish his superiority to Moses. But, be it observed, the truth here chiefly presented to us is, that whilst the LAW entered chiefly to awaken and disturb the conscience and mind, "grace and truth," which are now, and have always been, by Jesus Christ, constitute the provision against the terrors of that condition, and against the real danger, of which a quickened conscience is the certain monition,—constitute the sure foundation of hope to sinners, the occasion of their holiness, the source of all their blessedness. This it behoves those who speak in the name of Jesus to make known for salvation, by all legitimate means, (as I desire to make it known to you,) that when Jesus comes unto his own his own may receive him. The law cannot save, but he can. He is before Moses!

II. CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ALL CREATED INTELLIGENCES: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."—(Ver. 18.)

That there is an allusion to Moses in these words seems more than likely. Of him it is said elsewhere, that he saw God "face to face." God spake to him as a man speaketh to his friend. In the case of this prophet there was a distinction from that of any of those who either went before or came after him. An intimacy, as to the mode of communication, was vouchsafed unto Moses which was not, looking to the relation of facts given in

the word, accorded to any other. This was done that, besides his general typical character, in one special particular he might be a type of the great reality,—of "the Son in the bosom of the Father." Whatever the form in which the communications were held with him when God spake "face to face," its mere typical nature Moses himself was fully instructed in; for he was emphatically informed on the solemn occasion of his entreating God by prayer to "show him his glory," that no man could "*see his face* and live." Now, if there be an allusion to Moses in this 18th verse, as we think there is; and if Moses enjoyed the highest privilege ever bestowed on man, in his intercourse with the Almighty, whilst yet he had never seen God,—for "no man hath seen God at any time,"—then the "only begotten Son," who hath seen and declared him, is not only above and before Moses, but above and before all created intelligences.

The doctrine of the words under our notice evidently is, that God is invisible and incomprehensible to all, save to his Son Jesus Christ. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, nor the Father but the Son." He is one in essence with the Father,—one in all his counsels,—and from eternity he hath been with him. Because this is true, he knows the Father,—he has a perfect knowledge of all his glory. And whatever angels know, or the spirits of the just made perfect, or saints on the earth, they do know only in and by the Son. "He hath declared him,"—he who is in the bosom of the Father,—he who is his ONLY BEGOTTEN SON. Others besides Jesus Christ are sons of God. Angels are so called, for that re-

lation they hold to him by creation. Believers are so called, for they hold the same relation to him by regeneration and adoption. But Jesus Christ stands in the relation described by the term in question because of an incomprehensible and inexplicable generation, so that he is his "ONLY SON,"—language applied to him and employed to explain to us, so far as it can be explained, the eternal relation of the Son to the Father, of the Son who is "from the Father." In his pre-existent state, before he came into the world, such was his relation. In his incarnate state, when he tabernacled with man, such *was* his relation. Now that he has ascended into heaven, angels, principalities, and powers being made subject unto him in our nature, such *is* his relation; and so shall it be for ever and for ever. Thus is he qualified to "declare" the Father,—to reveal his glory. No angel is so qualified, no man, no being, in whatever condition or of whatever character; none but the "Son,"—only the SON, the Lord Jesus Christ!

1. If we ask, *what* he has declared of the Father? the question may be answered in several important forms. He has made known the true nature of God, and has banished utterly the gross conceptions of that nature which have been the fruit of the darkened and depraved minds of unconverted men. Particularly, he has revealed the spirituality of God,—that he is a spirit, and not material or corporeal. He has revealed his unity,—adopting and confirming that Scripture: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God." He has also revealed a trinity of persons in the unity of the Godhead; for he

and the Father are one, whilst the Spirit of truth proceedeth from the Father and from the Son. Consistently with this they who are baptized into the knowledge and service of the true God are, by his authority, everywhere baptized in the name "of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In short, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge being hid in Christ, he dispenses of them by bearing testimony to the things which he has seen and which he does know.

His perfections, no less than the nature of God generally, have been declared by him. His universal benevolence, as when he "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and the unjust," he has revealed: his sovereignty, as when he said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, because it seemed good in thy sight:" his justice, as when he said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," (he had come to the hour when the cup should be drunk to the dregs, that God's righteous claims on sinners to be saved should be satisfied, and he was "straitened" until his work was accomplished): his mercy, when he said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son:" his truth, when he said, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." All God's glorious character has been made known by him; the supreme aim of his life having been that the Father should glorify him, that he then might glorify the Father.

2. If we ask, *how* he declared him? that, too, is to be

answered in more than one particular. He was a perfect pattern of the Father,—the glass in which the Father was seen,—"the image of the invisible God,"—"the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." To see him was to see the Father, forasmuch as he is the only visible representation of him afforded either to angels or to men.

Further, he has made known his counsels. All that has been revealed of the secret purposes of the great God of heaven and earth has come by Christ. He was in the holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. His Spirit it was who was in them when they inquired and searched diligently of the great salvation, and prophesied of the grace which was to come to sinners; when, also, they signified what manner of time his sufferings should be accomplished, and the glory which should follow. As the prophets, before he came, spake by him, and under his authority, so did the apostles after him, when he was no longer on the earth. Of and from him, too, have all their successors been: of his institution, of his spiritual endowment, have been all evangelists, pastors, and teachers, given for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ. In him and through him only has God's heart been by his servants opened up to men.

His are the external means by which God is declared,—means appointed, according to his will, for the fulfilment of his gracious purposes. On that account they are to be valued, and to be waited on with all earnestness and sanctified expectation. When we remember that these ordi-

nances are, every one of them, part of that visible institution and most blessed arrangement under which "he whom no man hath seen at any time" is DECLARED, how important to us is the fact that we enjoy them! By the ordinances—even the WORD of Christ's utterance, in whatever mode expressed—faith and all the graces of the Christian character are implanted, cherished, and matured. In them the Lord himself is near for the grand intention which the text ascribes to him. Shall we not, then, cultivate opportunities so graciously vouchsafed? Shall we not give all diligence in this matter? What offence and injury must it be to despise, or to neglect such a time of visitation,—this day of grace,—the word which at first began to be spoken by the Lord for an end so high! How shall any man be able to answer it, if the declaration of God's counsel for our salvation, made in the form in which it is made, be set at nought?

Besides all we have stated, in Christ's blessed undertaking of revealing God, he exerts also a secret energy on the minds of his people. This is indispensable to their knowing God. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." By his unseen, but effectually felt influences, he opens the understanding. Then the gospel comes, "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and with much assurance." Without this, the declaration of the great things of God by the mere "oracles," is of no saving effect,—that knowledge does not avail. But in the day

when he gives his Spirit, he "plainly teaches us of the Father." That Spirit's most blessed influences are not withheld from those who esteem and wait for them, who value the outward means only as they are the instruments by which these influences are conveyed,—counting that in themselves simply, means are like wells without water, or clouds without rain, or shadows without substance.

This is eternal life, that we should know God and Jesus Christ. The entire agency of the Word and Spirit is employed, that we may have that knowledge and the eternal life therewith connected. Yet what ignorance of God prevails; what false conceptions; what imaginary views ever diverging farther and farther from the line of truth! "Some have not the knowledge of God," saith the apostle; "I speak this to your shame." And how many are called to blush under such a charge! How many, with all their advantages, in the times and country in which we live, have not that knowledge of God which, wherever it truly exists, gains the entire heart, subdues all resistance, induces all holy submission to the divine will, and secures all joyful acquiescence in every one of his arrangements! If we knew him in Christ, as he is declared by the "Son who is in the bosom of the Father," no longer would there be any disregard, any coldness, any distrust; no longer should we look suspiciously at him, or count his service bondage; no longer should we hope to find, separate from him, that intimacy of fellowship and uprightness of walk, which can only be bestowed on our nature when we are united to him.

Let no man forget that Christ is now giving the Word;

and that he waits to bestow the grace of the Spirit. Himself the Fountain of life, he will give of the water of life to those who will receive it, that being in them, it may ever flow forth in all acts of believing obedience. When there is no longer any curse,—when the throne of God and of the Lamb is established in our hearts,—then, as his servants, we shall serve him.

He is before Moses: He "is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

THE BAPTIST AND THE SANHEDRIM.

"And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us: what sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing."—John i. 19–28.

In this passage we have the second part of John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus. The circumstances in connection with which it was delivered are interesting, and must be considered particularly, whilst we examine the testimony.

Although, for a time, not interfered with in his ministry, John was not always, throughout his course, left unopposed and at peace. So long as he attracted but little

attention, and so long as his influence had not extended beyond the remote localities in which he first made his appearance, the authorities at Jerusalem did not interfere with him. Things changed when multitudes from that city began to resort to the desert places where he was occupied in discharging the duties of his high mission, and where he made his full testimony to be heard by all who came unto him; where, also, of them that heard, both inhabitants of Jerusalem and others, multitudes were baptized into the doctrine to which they listened from his lips. Then, as we learn from the passage before us, the great national council of the Jews deemed it not unworthy of them to occupy themselves with the question of the Baptist's ministrations. We have no reason to suppose that they did so in any friendly spirit. A spirit the very opposite, probably, influenced them. But, be that as it may, the measure adopted was the appointment of a deputation, composed of a selection of their number, whose proceedings with John are here detailed,—proceedings which gave occasion to the fresh testimony in behalf of Christ, and to the renewed exhibition of his glory to the minds of men with which this faithful advocate now charged himself. When God permits hindrances and harassments to overtake his real "labourers" in the vineyard, they may well take comfort, and assure themselves that he will turn all to the furtherance of the gospel.

The narrative of the proceedings of the deputation from the Sanhedrim presents us with a series of interrogatories addressed to John, as by authority, the answers to which, on his part, contain the testimony and the re-

newed proclamation of truth relating to the glory of Christ, which it was the object of the evangelist to record for the benefit of the Church in all times. These questions, with the answers to them, we shall consider in succession.

I. THE FIRST QUESTION IS CONTAINED IN THE 19TH VERSE: "This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, WHO ART THOU?"

The rumour had gone abroad that John was the Messiah,—that he gave himself out to be the Christ. The time had come when many were to appear in Christ's name. Some had already actually set up their pretensions to the honour of the Messiahship, and claimed the submission of men. A conviction prevailed, very generally, that the "fulness of the time" had come, —that the long-promised of God was about to appear,—whilst every thing in the outward circumstances of the Jewish people naturally led them to look eagerly for his appearing. For a season John's supposed pretensions had received the same treatment as those of others, which they were believed to resemble. But, now that his fame was spread abroad in all the land,—now that multitudes so numerous waited, with increasing devotedness, on his exciting ministrations,—and that extensive adherence to his doctrine began to be largely the practical effect of his preaching, the ecclesiastical authorities were roused and alarmed. To them it belonged to inquire into a state of things of which they could not be sup-

posed to be ignorant. To them, also, it belonged to judge in such questions as John's progress had raised,—to ascertain and determine their truth, that they might warn, admonish, correct, or reprove, as the case demanded.

The first question of the deputies, viewed in the light of the answer made to it, had an evident reference to the prevailing rumours, and was intended to bring out whether John claimed to be the Messiah. It seemed to assume that he sought to make the people believe that he was; and it, therefore, involved an insinuation that, in his preaching and usual doctrine, he was guilty of so acting.

When we consider how seriously the Baptist's heart was set on exalting Christ,—how sincerely he made *that* the one aim of his high vocation, and how accurately he was enabled at all times to realise his true position,—we may conceive what cause of grief and anxiety it must have been to him to lie exposed to a suspicion of the character implied in the question. His whole testimony proclaimed another to be Messiah. "He was sent to bear witness of that Light; he was not himself the Light, but he came to bear witness of him." Such was the unceasing declaration to which his multitudinous hearers were made to listen. The contrast between himself and the Messiah, of whom he so spake, was his favourite theme; in urging which he ascribed to himself, in relation to the object of his testimony, the humblest place. What pain, then, must he have felt when the echo, of the "voice in the wilderness," which reached him from Jerusalem, through the medium of this depu-

tation, was that he essayed to make himself the Messiah! No doubt the prevailing surmise and suspicion pierced his heart. The wound, indeed, was not occasioned by the personal injustice to himself. It was his poignant sense of the injury which might be expected to arise to the progress of the kingdom from prevailing impressions which pierced him. If men thought him the Messiah,—if such were the practical fruit of his ministry in any considerable degree,—what was to become of the cause of God intrusted to his hands?

John, certainly, was not exempted, by any special interposition of God, from experiencing that bitterness of opposition to the gospel which Satan is permitted to raise at all times, and in so many forms. Though the immediate forerunner of Christ, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, and very dear to God as a "man sent from him," he was compelled to suffer the usual "reproach of Christ"—the hard speeches of carnal and wicked men. In the face of that form of opposition he was required to pursue his work, and in Jeremiah's commission no doubt he read the terms of that under which he himself was bound to act, as all faithful ministers, in similar circumstances, must ever read theirs: "Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land: . . . . and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."

To the Baptist it must have been a relief of no ordinary kind that the secret mutterings and suspicions of those who were his enemies in his work were brought to himself. To the honour of the Sanhedrim it must be spoken, they did not condemn him unheard; they did not take up an ill report, to act on it, without inquiry; but of himself they demanded to know the truth or falsehood of the allegation which had been so extensively spread. Whether their intention was friendly or hostile, it must have appeared to the good man, suffering under the "defaming of many," to be of the gracious providence of God that such an investigation was made, and that in its having been instituted under the usual authority, opportunity was given him to make known the truth. His own personal vindication was, indeed, a small thing; but it was no small thing to be placed in a condition publicly to correct slanders injurious to the truth of Christ, to vindicate the testimony to his glory, and to rehearse in such ears as were now open to him what he had so zealously propagated amongst others. How content was he, accordingly, to give his examiners an answer! Whatever was his high position as the accredited messenger who had come before the Lord's face,—whatever his extraordinary position, his most honoured vocation, his public superiority to them who interrogated him,—he stood not on any privilege: whatever were his impressions of the character of the parties thus pretending to power over him, he stood not on that either, or on any other objection. They were in Moses' seat. They were the lawful authorities in all such matters as they now undertook to deal with—and

he readily and cheerfully answered for himself before them.

"WHO ART THOU?" is the question which they, in the first instance, propose to him. "He confessed, *and denied not;* but confessed, I am not the Christ." He meets the "defaming" of which he was the object, but of which his interrogators had made no direct mention, though their question implied their knowledge of it, as well as their object to search out its truth,—he meets it, without any semblance of hesitation, and as if he had been longing for the opportunity, with a positive contradiction, in language fervent, emphatic, and unequivocal. He confessed. He denied not. He made no sort of difficulty about it. He confessed—with a decision which the nature of the occasion certainly demanded—that he was not the Christ; and (for that is clearly involved in his answer) that he never had made any pretensions, directly or indirectly, to such honour! And how blessed for John that in this matter his conscience was clear—that his heart having been right with God, he had been preserved from the sin which was laid to his charge, and which was made the subject of suspicion with reference to his ministry! God's hand, too, must have been manifest to him, in providing an opportunity, such as he thus had, of openly replying. If men continued thereafter to listen to evil surmisings, he was clear of their guilt; and if his life was to be laid down in the great cause for which he was now suffering—as in due time happened—he had, meanwhile, defended the truth, by effectually forbidding the idea that in him the Saviour of the world was to be seen.

We may assure ourselves, the Lord will plead for and protect his own truth. He will not suffer it to be permanently injured. When enemies seek to injure it, in or through the persons of those who are appointed to proclaim it, in his own way and at the right season, he will send relief and magnify his word. What, after all, availed the evil and ignorant thoughts about John, as a barrier to impede the progress of the gospel? He had not ceased to preach Christ, though sounds which troubled him were in his ears. God had continued to own him too, and the word grew and prevailed. Let ministers go on, notwithstanding terrors of every kind. The roar is not the fatal leap of the lion. The one is often permitted when the other never occurs. Satan is always baffled by opposition in faith, and is made to flee when he is so resisted.

II. THE SECOND QUESTION IS CONTAINED IN THE 21ST VERSE: "And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No."

All sorts of injurious rumours seem to have been abroad of John, and of his pretensions. To him it happened in this as it has done to all whom God, in promotion of his great cause in the world, has, from age to age, exalted to eminent places, and made opposing barriers to the enemy coming in as a flood. Jeremiah knew it. "I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge

on him." The great apostle of the Gentiles knew it. How numerous the allegations were which men uttered against him to his injury, may be understood from the defences of himself, and the explanations which continually occur in his speeches and epistles; for everywhere, to whatever point he travelled in disseminating the truth as it is in Jesus, the Jews, his natural and sworn enemies, anticipated him, aiming to misrepresent his character and the object of his life, that they might successfully neutralise his testimony, and if possible destroy himself.

Of John, some reported that he gave himself out to be Elijah,—some, Jeremiah,—and others, the "prophet," like unto himself, whose coming Moses had foretold, whom the Lord their God should raise up. On these rumours John was now interrogated. But we naturally ask, how could such reports have had their origin? How could the imagination of them enter the minds of the people? Was there no reason for them? Is there no feasible ground of explanation why they were afloat?

One explanation, certainly, is the fact of the ignorance which prevailed in the Jewish Church at the period of John's ministry; an ignorance not confined to the multitude, but extending, even in its worst features, to the chiefs and leaders. An evidence of this ignorance we have in such a body supposing that "the prophet" was to be different from Messiah himself, and that Messiah was to come without a forerunner, they not once looking for that sign of his advent. When in doubt whether John was the Messiah, they might have inquired, "Where hitherto has been the messenger who is to go before the face of

him who is to come?" but they did not. Eagerness to condemn, which blinded them to their own inconsistencies, may perhaps explain why they did not content themselves with the assurance which the want of such an antecedent ought to have afforded them, that if the Baptist claimed to be the Messiah, he could be no true man. But it is more likely that their ignorance of the Scriptures, the absence of just apprehensions of the revealed mind of God, accounts for their credulity and for their error. The Scriptures were in their hands; the portions referring to the great event to which all eyes were then turned, were especially familiar to their minds; but how manifest their spiritual blindness, when in these circumstances they received the rumours concerning John, and made them the subject of such solemn investigation. How common is evil of this kind! What ignorance abounds of the things which God has written in his Holy Scriptures, even when the record is open to us, and when our lips speak of them! How seldom is "the heart established with grace"! And how ill prepared are we for the most part, even when it is so established, against being carried away by "divers and strange doctrines"!

Another explanation may be found in the gross superstition which distinguished the Jews of this period. They believed, for example, that Elijah was to come personally. This belief was one of the traditions which formed part of the doctrine of their teachers. With this was coupled the collateral belief that, previous to the appearing of the Tishbite, Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets, was to come. The question now put had reference to those

various unscriptural fancies—and John met it, in each particular, with a decided and categorical negative. He was not Elias, nor "that prophet," nor Jeremiah, nor any other of the old prophets. It is to be remembered that the object of the deputation was not to receive spiritual instruction,—that they had not come, in the spirit of sincere learners, to be informed by this "man sent from God" of the great things connected with his mission. In no such condition of mind did they put their questions. When John replied, accordingly, he did it in the summary form which we here find. He gave no explanation —to have done it would have been to cast pearls before swine, who would have turned on him and rent him for his pains. John had come in the spirit of Elias. He had come in fulfilment of the Scripture which foretold the appearing of that witness before the great and notable day of the Lord. When Jesus entered on his public ministry, the explanation now withheld was given: in the right understanding of the prophecy, Elias had come, although the Jews knew him not. Personally it was not the Tishbite, for no promise had been given of his personal presence on the earth until the day when Christ shall be revealed, accompanied by all his saints. Elias in his proper person, therefore, John declared he was not. This was his answer—the only answer which could be extorted from him, or which his examinators deserved.

If any should say that some appearance of discourtesy to the deputation may be traced in the abruptness of his responses, none can fail to perceive, at least, the fervency and decision with which he disclaimed for himself the

honour due only to the Lord, before whose face he went —his most faithful resolution to keep to his own place, his appointed position in the church, as under the conviction that only by doing so could he give to Jesus the glory due to his name. It is not difficult to discern what snares the great Enemy laid for this great servant of the Most High—what walks of ambition, what prospects of distinction, he opened to his view,—and we may conceive what powerful influences that tempter may have brought to bear on his mind to induce him to enter them. Had John been of the spirit of the son of Beor, which he was not, what might we not have seen of human cupidity and baseness under this temptation! If there was rudeness in his manner, it was rudeness which the times demanded,—rudeness excusable, if not justifiable, in a great reformer in circumstances like those in which he now found himself.

How dear should it be to the heart of all ministers of the glorious gospel to exalt Christ! How safe, sanctifying, salutary, satisfactory, must it be ever to aim at that as the great purpose of their life and ministry. They may not always be successful in their efforts to impress the minds of others. Many to whom they address themselves may be left, like John's hearers on the occasion before us, to be hardened in their sins. Little did those priests and Levites heed the Baptist's glowing enthusiasm for his Lord; and heartless will all faithful ministers often find the passive resistance to their word of truth on the part of many to be: but Christ will be honoured notwithstanding, and the word will not utterly fail, for "the humble he will teach his ways."

III. The third question is contained in the 22d verse: "Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us: what sayest thou of thyself?"

The spirit of this question is accusatory. The question, in the form in which it was put, implies that John had not been straightforward with them in what was past of their interview. It is as if they had been insisting on direct answers, and as if John had declined to give them, and had been evasive. They were but commissioners acting for others; they required to proceed according to the letter of their instructions: this John must have known; but such had been his mode of meeting their communications with him, that they were not able to understand him. He covered himself and his pretensions with a purposed obscurity; but they must demand explicitness,—they must insist on plain dealing, and the absence of all equivocation,—they must have a direct announcement, and a positive intelligible account of what he was and what he pretended to be. In short, he had been playing with them, but he should do so no longer!

How common are such insinuations against the upright on the part of men of ungenerous minds, and with what truth may it be concluded, generally, that when they utter them, it is from a secret consciousness that they are themselves capable of such delinquency! As with regard to John, we may demand "Wherein had he prevaricated,—wherein had he spoken otherwise than as he ought to have done under the interrogatories addressed to him?"—so also, in the name of other sufferers under the same

kind of slander, ought we to repudiate and repel all such unworthy insinuations, and to resist the evil intended to be done by them.

To the peremptory interrogation now addressed to him, John's reply was distinct and unhesitating as in the previous instances. Now he could tell the deputation directly, what none of their earlier questions afforded him the opportunity of telling. "He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." Without any circumlocution, he claimed at once, boldly and openly, to be the party of whom that prophet had spoken.—(Isaiah xl.) He had not been concealing this great fact. The past questions he had answered in the only terms in which they could have been answered, and the new question he answered in the very spirit in which he had replied to the others. If he then had in his eye the glory of his Master,—the supreme end of his mission as his forerunner,—so had he now. That purpose of his life had dictated all that he spoke to those priests and Pharisees.

John had his authority for his mission and work in the Word of God. To it he could appeal, as he did, and there he could read his warrant for what he preached and performed. Ought not all who engage in the ministry of the glorious gospel to have, in like manner, a clear mind on the subject of their call thereto —a clear mind as to their call to enter on the work, and a clear mind as to their duty to prosecute the work in every stage of its progress? If they have not this, how can they with unqualified boldness, zeal, and con-

scious uprightness, proclaim the testimony of Christ? Satan may attempt, as he ever does, to obscure their view of their warrant from above, so as to make them call it in question; but Christ can make it plain: and if he do not when they seek him for that end, it will be poor bondage-work to preach,—work at once servile and unsanctified. An ambassador who has lost his credentials, and who is conscious that if they be demanded he cannot produce them, will give but an uncertain sound in representing the master whom he professes to serve.

A part of the ministry of reconciliation is to prepare, to "make straight," the way of the Lord. His entrance into the heart is as the progress of a king. The gospel, therefore, is a royal proclamation. Preachers are the heralds of the Prince of peace; they precede him, and their message ever is: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and the King of glory shall come in!" What, we naturally ask, obstructs the King's way? how is he hindered from coming and taking possession of his own? "Mountains" of pride and ambition stand in the way; "valleys" of unbelief, dejection, and discouragement; the "crookedness" of hypocrisy and a deceitful heart; the "roughness" of depraved passions and evil lusts. All these make the heart of man an *unstraight* way for Christ. Under their power, sinners do not realise their need of him,—they have no perception of his desirableness,—and they feel no alarm in the prospect of standing at the judgment-seat "without Christ." The way, therefore, must be made straight,—it must be prepared for the Lord. The preparation is, indeed, of himself; but minis-

ters are called to accomplish it as John was. They act in his name, and as his agents. He sends power with their word,—the "power of Elias." Then the "mountains are made low"—they "flow down;" the "valleys are exalted;" the "rough places are made smooth;" and the Lord comes to his own.

Whilst ministers feel the solemnity of their office, as called to go before the Lord to prepare his way, and whilst they act in the spirit of true and earnest desire that all hearts may be opened to receive him, let them remember that they are but a "voice in the wilderness." In themselves they have no power to prepare man for Christ,—that excellency is of himself. They are, therefore, to seek the power, to wait for it, to depend on it at his hand: and then their eye is to be to the thing which the granting of that power ever effects. John's preaching aimed at conviction of sin in them who heard him: conviction, evidently, in his view, was the great preparation to make man willing to embrace Christ, and to rejoice in him. The law hath entered—and it constitutes a part of the gospel message—that the offence may abound, that by it may be the knowledge of sin. The mere formalities and stateliness of religion—the scenic representations of carnal institutions—therefore, John esteemed as of little value. These were at Jerusalem, but he was in the wilderness. The mere parade and pomp of a barren profession God had long borne with, but John knew that he was to bear with it no longer. The axe was now laid at the root of the tree, and every tree which bore not fruit, fruit meet for repentance, was to be cut down and cast into the fire. This

John proclaimed, and by proclaiming it prepared the way of the Lord. The rule has not been changed since John's times. Let us so preach, and let us so believe.

IV. The fourth question is contained in ver. 25: "And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?"

Here the spirit of the deputation comes out in its proper character. In the previous verse, the evangelist is careful to inform us that they were all of the Pharisees,—of that sect of Jews who were pre-eminently the enemies of the gospel and of its divine Author. Their examination of John had satisfied them that he made no such pretensions as had been reported, the rumour of which had alarmed them. Probably, having now heard and seen him, they conceived a mean opinion of him. Secular and carnal in every feeling, and associating the Messiah's day with all that was magnificent in human eyes; accustomed, moreover, to the splendour of the temple services and the costliness of their entire ritual; when they looked on this wilderness preacher, and considered his uncouth appearance, clothed as he was in the coarsest raiment,—raiment made of camel's hair, held together by the most common leathern girdle,—as Goliah disdained David, so did they him; and as the one Herod, after a little, dismissed all alarm from his breast about the babe of Bethlehem, and the other despised the Jesus whom he had so eagerly longed to see, so did they cease to feel fear or respect for John. In this there was nothing but what is wit-

nessed every day on the part of those who persist in "knowing Christ only after the flesh," and in applying to the truth which refers to him and to his kingdom, the rule by which they judge of the things of time and of the world. No wonder though it be asked, "When the Lord cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

John's inquisitors haughtily demand, "Why baptizest thou then?"—Why presume to that office? His ready reply was promptly given: "John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."—(Ver. 26, 27.) He baptized because there stood among them one whom they knew not—the "Word made flesh"—the great Creator, clothed with humanity. They beheld not his glory. He was small in their eyes; but, as the long promised, and the long expected, he had come; his feet now stood on the earth, and suddenly should he appear in his temple. John was his forerunner, and he baptized men, therefore, into the doctrine of faith in him. But John baptized only with water. He used, and could use, no more than outward means; such means, however, as the Spirit could bless, and did bless,—the Spirit of Him, who, though coming after himself in point of time, was preferred before him,—of one so great in majesty, that his shoe's latchet, John, though his commissioned prophet, the most honoured of all prophets, was not worthy to unloose. He by his Spirit should baptize *with fire.*

The Baptist evidently alluded to doctrine with which the ears of his ordinary disciples were familiar. He spoke

of the saving change which the grace of the Saviour, where it is bestowed, ever produces; and he would have directed his present hearers to him that they might be made partakers of that grace. Sin had not only made the gold *dim*,—tarnished the original purity of man's nature,—but had *changed* it. It was no longer, in its intrinsic character, what God had made it. In its every particle it had become corrupt. The purifying required, then, was not the mere burnishing of what had faded, but the transformation of what had been, in all its qualities, defiled and vitiated. A baptism *with fire* alone was equal to so wonderful a consummation, and the power to bestow that baptism rested with one whom the priests and Pharisees knew not. Him John declared to them.

Ah! the excellency of Christ, through whom we have indeed the forgiveness of sins; but through whom, also, we have by faith the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost!

THE LAMB OF GOD.

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."—John i. 29-34.

These verses contain the Baptist's third testimony to the excellency of Christ. The *first* was published immediately after Jesus had been baptized, and when he departed into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The *second* when John was visited by the deputation from the Jewish Sanhedrim, and when they subjected him to the examination which they then instituted. His *third* testimony, as recorded here, was uttered on the return of Jesus from the scene of his temptation.

On the various occasions on which John spake of the Lord, his testimony was invariably of the same character, —previous to Christ's coming to him to be baptized, and

therefore, when as yet he was not made known to him,—when Jesus actually came to him again,—when he was absent in the wilderness,—and now, on his return thence, after he had triumphed. The scene of the transactions here noted is specially recorded. It was "in Bethabara beyond Jordan" (ver. 28.), in the neighbourhood of the desert where the dread conflict with the enemy took place. The first man, amidst the beauties of paradise and with every advantage to resist, failed and fell before the same enemy. The second man, amidst the horrors of the wilderness,—the weakness of his humanity sustaining the load of a world's guilt,—abode faithful, and prevailed;—abode faithful to Him who had appointed him, and to the people for whom he had undertaken his mighty work.

Christ's high object, as we have seen, was to manifest, or visibly to declare the invisible God;—was to afford to angels and to men a demonstration of the divine glory. In the previous part of this chapter, he is testified of, in fulfilling the object thus ascribed to him, as the Creator of all things,—God revealing his dignity and excellency in him by the works which he made; and he is testified of also as assuming human nature to qualify himself for another work, in executing the divine eternal purpose, that in like manner he should declare Him who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto. We come now, accordingly, to contemplate Christ's *vicarious* work,—the ever-blessed provision through his humiliation for the recovery of our lost world,—the fulness of the Godhead in him on behalf of the church, which is his body.

In the verses before us Christ is proclaimed to be the

one sacrifice for sin,—John's previous testimony concerning the Messiah is applied to him,—and the way in which the Baptist was made to know his person is narrated.

We confine ourselves in the present discourse to the first of these topics,—Christ, the one sacrifice for sin :— I. *The object of saving faith,—the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world.* II. *The duty to which John summoned his hearers, when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"* III. *The parties who were so summoned by him.*

I. THE OBJECT OF SAVING FAITH,—THE LAMB OF GOD TAKING AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.

We cannot doubt what thoughts were immediately suggested to his hearers by the expression employed by the Baptist on this occasion. The lamb of God was the original and universal sacrifice. It was that which from the foundation of the world worshippers were instructed to offer, and that which, amidst all the changes in the progress towards the perfection of the typical ordinances, held its own prominent place. It was the "morning and evening sacrifice." The offering of it constituted the stated public service of every day. The substance of the sacrifice was a *lamb*,—a male of the first year, without blemish,—the offering not being presented for individuals (provision for individual offerings being made by a separate ordinance), but for the whole body of the people. By this sacrifice, a continual remembrance of sin was kept up : at the same time confession was made, the priests laying their hands on the

head of the victim, and transferring to it the ceremonial transgressions of the people, that they might be taken away, and cease to be charged against them.

In the prophecy of Isaiah (chap. liii.), where the advent of the Messiah is foretold, the allusion, apparently, is to this original and universal sacrifice. That John had Isaiah's words present to his mind, seems more than probable; and their appositeness appears, with equal probability, to have consisted in the reference to the morning and evening sacrifice. So we have it prophetically announced, that Jesus "was brought as a *lamb* to the slaughter,"—that, as a "*sheep* before her shearers is dumb, he opened not his mouth,"—that he was "oppressed and afflicted,"—that he "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows,"—and that by "his stripes we are healed;"—from which scriptures, as well as from all other passages of a similar character, John's hearers might have been expected to be prepared for such a testimony as he now uttered, referring to the way in which the Messiah should execute his high office, and thereby reveal the glorious character of God.

Here is the object of faith,—the true, the only object of faith. Here is not the shadow, but the very substance of the great Sacrifice. In contemplating it we behold the Eternal WORD made flesh; clothed with humanity, that he might thereunto assume the sins of the world which he came to save,—to take them away, to bear them in his own body on the accursed tree, that they might be blotted out for ever, and exist no more as a charge against his people. To our minds, the object which presents itself in the words of John's testimony, is Jesus in all the

humiliation to which he submitted. We see him in his mean birth and his humble upbringing; in his life of poverty, reproach, and persecution; in the contentions and contradictions of sinners against him, to which he was ever subjected; in the agonies of Gethsemane, the overwhelming affliction which fell upon him there, when he "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears;" standing in the high priest's hall, surrounded by Herod's soldiers, compelled to listen to their profane ribaldry, to submit to their insulting treatment of his person; arraigned at Pilate's judgment-seat; bending to have his cross laid upon him; too exhausted to carry it, and borne to the earth in the attempt; nailed to that tree, and suffering its pains amidst the jeers of the exulting multitude,—and, worse, suffering them under the frown of his Father's face,—down to the moment when his expiring cry proclaimed the end of the conflict, and the departure of his spirit for repose to the bosom of his God. In all this we behold the "Lamb of God" taking away the sin of the world! In all this we behold justice satisfied, the law fulfilled, magnified, made honourable, principalities and powers spoiled, and the final victory over his own and his people's enemies achieved!

To this mystery believers of previous dispensations looked forward. The "morning and evening sacrifice" was a mirror in which they saw it. All the sacrifices represented it. The whole system of typical ordinances was intended supremely to serve the same end. That Abel saw the day of Christ, made his offering pleasing to God, and profitable to himself: "By faith he offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he

obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts:" how blessed in his history Abel was, the Jews knew; but he was blessed only through Christ, and by faith in his name. That Abraham saw this day of Christ, constituted the excellence of his obedience, when, on God's command, he went to offer even his son of promise as a burnt-offering,—perhaps the most distinguished type of the "Lamb," which, under all the dispensations of shadows, had ever been granted. John would now have the faith of his hearers to coincide with that of Abel and of Abraham, and of all the worthies who had foreseen the day of Christ, and had been glad in the prospect. Here they might behold that to which those worthies looked forward. To the generation whom he then addressed had come the day which their fathers had longed to see, but had not seen. Them had "the Day-spring from on high" visited. How great, how glorious their privilege, did they but know it,—could they but perceive and understand the time of their visitation!

Never has there been any variation in the great doctrine referring to the way of eternal life. Now it is as it has been from the beginning. That doctrine is "CHRIST CRUCIFIED, to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." No doctrine other than this has ever been preached for salvation by the appointment of God, and no other doctrine ever shall be. It was the very substance of the institutions which have passed away. It was the theme of all the forerunner's proclamations; that

upon which Jesus himself dwelt, when he spake the words of everlasting life; that with which he commissioned his apostles, and evangelists, and pastors, and teachers. It is the doctrine which is destined to run through all the earth, to bring light, and life, and blessedness, upon all its scenes of darkness, degradation, and woe. Here is the truth by which is made known how the sin of the world is taken away. Never has a soul been saved from sin but by the "Lamb of God." Never shall a soul be saved from sin but by him. All that the Father hath given to Jesus certainly come to him. He receives them every one. Whosoever they are, he in no wise rejects them. They are the Father's. Of his eternal purpose they are to be saved, to be brought home to his house, and no way is open to that house and to himself but by Jesus. Therefore he receives them, for they are given unto him; he makes them his own, imputes his righteousness, imparts his life; he seals and beautifies them with his own image, and conducts them to glory. Such is the universal doctrine. Christ crucified is the all in all of a sinner's hope!

II. THE DUTY TO WHICH JOHN SUMMONED HIS HEARERS: "Behold the Lamb of God."

1. *It was to receive the tidings which he conveyed to them.*

John's work was to point Christ out to the eye of faith. The fulness of time had come. All prophecy preliminary to the great advent had been fulfilled. Every thing was complete. It had been foretold by the mouth of his

servant Malachi, that he should "send his messenger before him;" and by his servant Isaiah, that the voice of the messenger should be that of "one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." This was now receiving its accomplishment. John was that messenger, and he now stood in the midst of them to execute his commission, and to proclaim the actual arrival and presence of the long-promised of the Lord. If they asked, "WHERE he was to be seen?" John's answer was, "THERE!" as he pointed to Jesus of Nazareth. He had already published the tidings at his baptism; and now, as Jesus came to him after his temptation, seeing him approach, he published them again.

No event had ever occurred in the history of the world like that to which he thus called their attention. He of whom Moses in the law and all the prophets had spoken, actually stood upon the earth. To John, in his capacity of the messenger appointed to go before his face, the mystery had been revealed, that he should make it known. To do this was the supreme end of his mission. To his own joy, as the friend of the Bridegroom, and to the joy of all who waited for the consolation of Israel, he performed his great duty.

The information, that "God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world," is that to which men's attention in every age, and under all circumstances, is supremely and imperatively called. It is the truth of truths: not that it is one of many great historical facts, and of importance in being so,—not merely that; but that it is the great

central truth on which the entire interest of the history of this globe hangs. What a tumult of disturbance in the mind of Satan has this truth, and the historical fact revealed in it occasioned, and what, the knowledge and the belief of it extending in the world! How mighty the efforts made by that enemy to prevent both,—to obscure and neutralise the testimony referring to it, and to prevent conviction of its certainty! In vain has he raged; his efforts have only tended to make the truth more prominent, more manifest, and more accredited. Defenders of the doctrine of God have, in unbroken succession through all ages, been raised up: as its advocates, they have been guided, and blessed, and made triumphant.

If we have had communicated to *us* the tidings to which John summoned the attention of his hearers, may we not ask with what effect has this been done? If rightly received, the message must tell on our entire character. To embrace the truth, as God would have us, is the true secret of godliness. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, *that we might live through him;*" not, certainly, that his advent should simply constitute an era from which time might date and the lapse of centuries be reckoned, but that the belief of the truth involved in it should be the origin of our spiritual, everlasting, heavenly existence. Then do we first begin to live, in the right acceptation of the term, when the record which God hath given concerning his Son is accepted by faith,—a faith wrought in the heart,—and when we thus become one with the Lord of life by vital union.

2. *John summoned his hearers to banish from them whatever might oppose the reception of the tidings which he communicated.*

The Jews had much to do in this way. The high value which they set on their temple, their pedigree of kings and priests, and their whole outward condition with reference to the oracles of God, committed specially to their charge as they were to no other nation, constituted a sad occasion of opposition to the gospel. They ought not to have done so. They ought to have done the very reverse. But we know to what an extent the mournful fact of which I speak was realised in them. It were an error, however, to say, that in this they were different from others. The natural operation of the heart of every man is to induce him to go about to establish a righteousness of his own; and, although in modes less feasible than that in which the Jews attempted it, all naturally aim to accomplish the hopeless task. The glad tidings of good things may sound in their ears,—the successors in spirit of the Baptist may proclaim, under the authority of the "faithful and true Witness," "Behold the Lamb of God!" but as the rainbow in the cloud—the token to Noah's descendants of God's covenant established with them—was despised, and their Babel was reared as a security more to be trusted than the bow, so in all ages men of every name, to whom the gospel comes too often, refuse to hear Him who speaks from heaven; and, trusting in mere human devices, oppose themselves to the reception of his grace, and to faith in its riches.

How many things stand in the way! Our good

character, as in the case of Job, when a self-righteous spirit asserted its ascendancy in him; an amiable temper, a calm demeanour, as in the case of Moses the meekest of men; station in the church, as in the case of Judas and others; membership; stated and habitual order in the use of means; in short, the mistake of esteeming the scaffolding to be the temple of God. But we must be emptied of all such devices: we must be made to lose confidence in every such hope. That lesson God will certainly teach his people. He so taught his servant Job, and then Job abhorred himself, being made to see his own vileness. He taught Moses by the dreadful event at the waters of Meribah. He taught the apostles by the humbling example of Judas, and even of Peter. And he taught the primitive church generally by such examples as those of Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, and others, beacons set up for the warning of all times. Our teaching must be of a similar kind,—teaching which will lead to the removal of every obstacle to the glad reception of "the truth as it is in Jesus,"—teaching which will make us give a hearty and thankful welcome to the joyful sound. This will be to clear away the rubbish upon which no superstructure can be securely built; will be to dig deep and to lay bare the Rock of Ages to the eye of faith,—that foundation of God other than which there can be none,—in order that upon it we may rear the superstructure of all our anticipations for time and for eternity.

3. *John summoned his hearers to rest positively on Christ.*

Considering the position in which he stood, we may suppose that the call which he addressed to them was like that which Noah, for the hundred and twenty years during which he was occupied in building his ark, ever addressed to the inhabitants of the world before the flood; or, perhaps, rather like that which the Lord addressed to Noah himself, when his work was completed: "Come thou and all thine house into the ark." There was no other place of safety: for the gathering clouds, and perhaps the heaving earth, had already too surely declared the necessity of the asylum which then stood ready to receive the patriarch. Or John's call was like the invitation addressed to the people of Israel, when their camp was invaded by the fiery flying serpents, after Moses had, by the divine command, lifted up the brazen serpent in full view of every eye. The wounded needed cure, every one needed protection and a sense of security. These were to be found in one form only, and to that the exposed and suffering were directed. With what earnestness must Moses and his appointed deputies have urged the people, not merely to put away every other hope, but to look steadily and in faith to the hope which God had sent them. An earnestness of a similar kind animated John, and to a duty of a similar character he called his hearers, when he exclaimed, pointing to Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Surely it is our duty to give heed, and to respond to appeals thus made in what we read and in what we hear; to see that we answer, and that our response is the expression of faith, whilst we abandon every refuge of lies, cleaving with purpose of heart only to "the Lamb."

"I have gotten a man from the Lord," cried our first mother on the birth of Cain, after she had received the promise, and in her ignorance, perhaps, imagined that in her first-born she beheld the "SEED" on whose coming her soul reposed its hope. Whatever may have been her mis-conception, whatever her sad mistake, the earnestness of her heart cannot be questioned. How great is the duty, on our part, to be quickened in our minds, when summoned to look to Jesus, when summoned to see him, —to believe, to trust, to rejoice in him! Then it becomes an obligation by which we are solemnly bound, earnestly to seek God to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, that, apprehending the great object of faith, our precious souls may live and not die.

III. THE PARTIES WHO WERE CALLED TO THIS DUTY.

1. *Generally all men are called.* That it was a mixed multitude which surrounded John at the moment he spake the words of this glorious invitation we know, but he addressed it to them all,—to priests and Pharisees, to publicans and harlots, to soldiers and Sadducees. "Go into all the world, preach the gospel to *every creature;* and, lo, I am with you always!" The proclamation is appointed to be made to all, and the Spirit is promised in connection with the proclamation. He who sends it is no respecter of persons: "In every nation they who fear him and work righteousness are accepted." There is no obstacle to the accomplishment of the ends of the gospel but the corruption of man, his love of sin, and the power which Satan exerts over him. Whatever may be our occupation, the first and

great duty is to hear and obey the message of salvation. That word is preached unto all men for "the obedience of faith,"—to men in every condition, and of every character, whether immersed in business, struggling with the burden of domestic cares, or pursuing the phantasm of pleasure. "One thing is needful," and it is the duty of all equally to accept that "good thing," which, when they once possess it, shall never be taken from them. If any man neglect "so great salvation" thus brought nigh, what a death awaits him! How shall he escape? where shall he hide himself? Let us, then, hear the word as addressed to us individually without exception, and thus may we "behold the Lamb of God."

2. *Those who thirst:* those who are conscious that they need a resting-place, that they need an object on which to bestow their affections, an object to fill and satisfy their hearts,—those who have tasted all that earthly things can minister, who have weighed and tried them and found them wanting,—those who thirst and drink, but still are parched,—those who labour, are weary and heavy-laden, —those who, though they work, feel as if their work were ever to begin,—those who, though they seem to themselves to be toiling forward and upward, are yet painfully conscious that their progress towards satisfactory repose is uniformly baffled by a hidden influence which they can neither comprehend nor control;—to all such it is said, "Behold the Lamb of God:" abandon every hope but that: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is

good." Sin is your burden,—sin is the exhausting element in your oppressive malady. The blood and Spirit of Jesus alone can remove it, alone can give peace to your soul. Seek him, and he will be found of you. Call upon him, and he will answer you.

3. *Those who are pierced by God's arrows:* those who not only drink and thirst again, and are merely in the condition of the Woman of Samaria when she first found Christ at Jacob's well, but to whom also the "commandment has come," in whom "sin has revived," and who have "died,"—those who are like that same woman when, convinced of her sin, she confessed all, saying unto Jesus, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet,"—those who are like the jailor, not when he was under terror of earthly exposure and of human punishment as answerable to his superiors in temporal authority, but when, secure as to the possession of his prisoners, he yielded to divine conviction, fell down before them as God's messengers sent to him for salvation, and cried, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"—those, in one word, whose sins possess their reins, who see the plague of their heart, and feel the poison of God's arrows drinking up their spirit! To all such the call is, "Behold the Lamb of God." To look elsewhere is sin, and not to look here is sin. Be your sorrow, your distemper, what it may, here is the remedy; but it is nowhere else. Seek it,—wait for it: so doing, he that "shall come will come" to you, "and he will not tarry."

JESUS THE MESSIAH.

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."—John i. 29-34.

Having spoken of Christ as the true sacrifice for sin,—the first part of the Baptist's *third* testimony, as recorded in this chapter,—we come now to speak of the remaining parts, viz., *The application to Jesus of his previous doctrine concerning the Messiah,* and, *His account of the manner in which he was made acquainted with the person of Jesus.*

I. John's Application to Jesus of his Previous Doctrine concerning the Messiah. "This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me."

By this form of expression the forerunner evidently

made known the great subject of his testimony. It seems to have been habitual to him. Instances occur both in the 15th and 27th verses, and we may conclude that to all his usual hearers the words were familiar, "He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me." They declare,—

1. *The doctrine of Christ's eternal Godhead.* "He was preferred before me: *for he was before me.*" In that the Baptist speaks *the truth* which the evangelist records in the beginning of this chapter. Jesus was before John, for he was "before all things," as "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." The evangelist rehearses, with great satisfaction, this expression of the Baptist's testimony,—it so accords with and confirms his own. Both servants are equally earnest in proclaiming the sublime mystery which the truth contains. Whatever may have been the outward condition of Jesus as he then stood in the midst of them, and however that outward condition might prove a "stumbling-block" to many of those who witnessed it, his majesty and glory consisted in that which they were thus declared to be. The Baptist reverts to all his past doctrine concerning the Messiah, and he now applies all to the man whom they saw before them. "THIS is he of whom I spake."

We may conceive how unpalatable to the Jews, under present circumstances, this testimony must have been, and what disappointment must have filled their hearts when they heard it. The Baptist had testified of the divine nature, the eternal existence, the most glorious character, of Him who was about to appear; also of the mighty

changes to be effected by his administration, for the axe was now laid at the root of all ancient institutions, and the kingdom of heaven, even the kingdom of Him for whom they looked, was at hand. When the reputed son of Joseph and Mary came to be baptized, although not distinguishable from any individual of the multitudes who assembled to hear John on the banks of Jordan, he at once declared, "THIS is he of whom I spake unto you." And now, when wasted, haggard, and toiled, just escaped from the forty days and forty nights sore encounter in the wilderness, his outward appearance, perhaps, meaner than in any other hour of his earthly history, he again stood before him, John repeated the testimony, saying, as on the previous occasions, "THIS is he of whom I said, After me cometh," &c. Although the prophet had foretold that when they saw the Messiah, he should have "no beauty that they should desire him,"—"no form, no comeliness, but be like a tender plant and a root out of a dry ground,"—they were not prepared for the sight presented to them in the person of Jesus, nor for the exercise of faith to which that sight consequently called them. O what sadness of disappointment! Could there be no alleviation, nothing to appease the mortification of feeling which they experienced? There was nothing: John seemed sternly to disregard their chagrin, and, notwithstanding the unpopularity which might arise to himself from the course which he pursued, he reiterated his statement, and still declared, "THIS IS HE."

It must be pleasing to God that unchanging steadfastness should be manifested by ministers of the Word, in

ever making known the testimony of truth which he has committed to them; that there should be no changing in doctrine to meet the varying views of men; that there should be no qualifying, and no modifying of the message addressed to them. It is to be remembered on all occasions, that Christ, and the testimony of Christ, may be expected to be a "wonder and a sign spoken against" by men carnal in their impressions and earthly in their views. How different must the real truth always be, from the imaginations of the thoughts of the hearts of those who have never been enlightened from above; and how necessary, therefore, must it be on the part of ministers, that they zealously and conscientiously avoid swerving even in the least particular from that which God has in his word commanded to be spoken. To preach is to display the glory of Christ in the right view of that glory; it is ever to exhibit its true character, however opposed that may be to the false preconceptions of the natural mind, and notwithstanding the contempt which the truth may produce there. Every ambassador of the Lord has to bear as a cross the offence which the true doctrine never fails to occasion to the unrenewed nature,—the contrariety of such doctrine to all the impressions and convictions of that nature,—and the distrust and secret repudiation with which it meets. But for their comfort let them be assured, that never will they who are faithful have cause to repent being so; and never will they be compelled to draw back from that which they have asserted, as if they had erred in their word. The things which they have spoken of Christ will every day become more manifest in their truth and excellence to

themselves, as well as to those who receive their doctrine; and in the end all shall witness the perfect confirmation of their testimony, and of their commendations of their despised Lord, for he changeth not, but ever abides THAT which his Scriptures of truth declare him to be.

2. *The doctrine of Christ's eternal Godhead associated with his human nature.* "After me cometh a MAN who was preferred before me." Here is the mystery: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Behold the manifestation of God in the form in which, above all others, he reveals his glory to his intelligent creatures both in heaven and in earth! Behold, also, the comfort to the sinner seeking salvation which this revelation affords: see the ladder let down from heaven to earth,—even to its lowest places; not piercing the earth, indeed, and descending beneath it, but placed upon its surface reaching into its deepest valleys. The more humble the condition in which the eternal Son of God appeared, the more consoling the view of his character to those who know themselves: "Though rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." Ah, how poor did he condescend to become, and how much in the form of a servant was he for our sakes! When we attain to right convictions of our true spiritual condition; when, under the operations of saving grace, we are cast down under all but despairing views of obtaining God's favour;—then what happiness is there in the thought that Christ stooped so low,—that he qualified himself in such forms as he did, only that he might discharge the duty of a KINSMAN to such unworthy outcasts as we are,—a

kinsman to redeem that which we had forfeited, and to restore it to us; nay, more, a kinsman to unite us to himself, to be to us what Boaz was to Ruth, and thus to raise us from the dust, and lift us from the dunghill, to set us with princes, with the princes of the people.

What a thought! That he might be as lowly as I am, that he might associate with me, that he might take me into union with himself, that he might make me a partaker of heavenly and eternal blessings,—he became a man; and a man in so humble a condition! "After me cometh A MAN that is preferred before me, for he was before me." No wonder that John, with such intensity of address, summoned his hearers to behold "the Lamb of God." To behold him is the great duty of life: to receive the testimony of Jesus, to renounce and banish from us what might prevent or forbid it, to rest in and upon him, to look to nothing beyond this, but to have him as our all and in all, is the primary obligation, as it is the unspeakable privilege of our nature.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE BAPTIST WAS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH THE PERSON OF JESUS.

1. *He did not know him.* Ver. 31, "And I knew him not;" ver. 33, "And I knew him not," that is, he did not then know him by revelation. If we must conclude that John and Jesus often met, that they knew each other as being relations after the flesh, the Baptist's language certainly teaches that he did not know Jesus to be the Messiah—that he was not instructed in that mystery.

This, let us be assured, was a part of the divine provi-

dential arrangement,—an arrangement by which all collusion was rendered impossible. Combination, deception, imposture, as invented and practised by them, there could be none. John is careful to make this known. He well knew the ease with which suspicions are excited, with which injurious prejudices are conceived, and he seeks accordingly to anticipate and obviate them. It was a fact in the divine arrangements connected with the manifestation of Christ in the world, and John called the attention of all to it, that although the communications to him, as the messenger who went before the face of the Lord, were numerous and precise on other and all necessary points, it did not please God to instruct him in the secret of the Messiahship of the son of Mary—even if he was known to him by ordinary acquaintance and intercourse subsequent to the tender years of their infancy.

John was serving no selfish end in preaching Christ. He was compassing no sinister purpose. He was not taking a part in any conspiracy against men. There might be those among his followers who, in their present temper, judging by themselves, might be ready to suspect collusion on the Baptist's part with one whom they must very soon discover, if the discovery had not already been made, to be of his kindred, and a blood relation. But there was none; and the fact which he announced, when he said, "I knew him not," proved it. In perfect simplicity and honesty he fulfilled his high vocation as obeying God. His commission he had received from him, and faithfully he executed it, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left. Being, by divine appointment, "the voice of

one crying in the wilderness," his "CRY" was just that which he had been ordained to utter. He added nothing to it, he kept nothing back. And so ought it ever to be with all who are ambassadors for God, that they may keep a conscience void of offence toward him. By speaking the very truth which he hath committed to them, they may sometimes be placed in circumstances which will excite the suspicions of men,—men little instructed in spiritual things, and pre-occupied with the fancies of their own creation,—but they are bound to speak it, bound to "preach the preaching" which God bids them, be the consequences to themselves what they may, for so only can they be free of the blood of men.

It is worthy of remark, that the fact of which we have spoken teaches clearly that the personal knowledge of Christ is not necessary to our testifying fully of him. Though John did not know him personally, he did know him after the Spirit, he did know him savingly. This was the essential preparation for a right ministry, in his high capacity as "forerunner;" and it is always the essential preparation for a man's efficiently holding forth the Word of life: "Whom having not seen we love, and in whom though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." It behoved apostles, indeed, to see him personally; and so Paul, as an apostle, "born out of due time," not only saw him when he met him by the way, but was actually taken up to the third heavens, where, no doubt, he beheld his glory. But only in their case was that required. John was his faithful minister,—the bold advocate of the truth which testified

of him, when he had not yet seen or known him personally or in his public capacity as the one Mediator between God and man. Many successors of the apostles, in the right sense of succession, knew him not personally, even in the days of his flesh,—such as Apollos, and others like him,—but it affected not either the credibility, the unction, or the power of their testimony. Far more precious was it that they knew him as their Saviour and their God, than that they should have known him by personal intercourse,—far more precious was it that he had washed them from their sins in his blood, and made them "kings and priests," "able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the Spirit." Even though a man saw the Lord, though he knew him after the flesh, though in that relation he were of his brethren, it could constitute no qualification for the ministry, and could in no wise countervail the disqualification of an unconverted and unsanctified nature.

2. *He baptized with water that Christ should be made manifest to Israel.* Ver. 31 : "But that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water."

The gospel, whether administered by word or sacrament, has ever the same object,—to exhibit Christ, to reveal an unknown Saviour to the world lying in the wicked one, and to exhibit the grand object of its faith to the church which Christ has purchased with his blood. John had, indeed, a peculiar mission. It was to preach that the kingdom was at hand, it was to make known to mankind that the Son of God had actually come in the flesh, and to point him out in person. But his general mission was

that of all ministers ; its end was that by it Jesus should be made manifest, and that the great object of his advent should be published abroad. In short, John's general mission was to do that which Christ referred to in one sense, when he said, " And I, if I be *lifted up*, will draw all men unto me." John held the Saviour up to view.

Baptism by water is emblematic. It testifies of Christ, and makes him known in his twofold power : in his power to pardon, in his power to purify. Such authority, such virtue, such grace, are his, that he can forgive sin to the very uttermost; that he can renew the sinner in his mind ; that he can so ingraft us into himself, and make us partakers of his nature, that we shall be purified through the indwelling and effectual operation of his Spirit. To proclaim this John came baptizing with water. Not only was there the use of the " word of doctrine," but there was the use of the "sign" also. He came to Israel after the flesh,—to those who professed that they looked for salvation in Israel,—to those, in short, who represented in themselves professed believers in the great truths of the Scriptures. To faith, therefore, as supposed to exist in them, his word, and the celebration of the emblematic ordinance, were addressed. " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," was the cry which he by each ordinance sounded abroad; the Lamb of God which taketh away sin, at once in its guilt and in its uncleanness. Such views of the Saviour's grace did this faithful servant seek to promulgate, such truth did he seek to have applied to the souls of his hearers. His object was practical. He would have them to

escape the wrath to come; as prisoners of hope to flee to their stronghold; as the blood-guilty to enter into their city of refuge! What was all else? If they came short here, of what value were their outward distinctions, their national antecedents, or their denominational vanity?

3. *God gave him a sign whereby he might know the true Messiah.* Ver. 33: "And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." Such was the sign. With what earnestness must John have waited for it! At length it came. Ver. 32: "And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him,"—upon Jesus of Nazareth, who then stood in their midst, under his eye, that lowly man, now the observed of all observers.

The sign was the form of a dove, descending from heaven, and abiding on him. It was revealed from God, that by this token the Messiah should be discovered to John. The authority which commissioned him in his work, appointed the sign and gave him notice of it. He was, therefore, as much bound to wait on for the appearing of the sign, as he was bound to preach or to baptize with water. Like Samuel when he visited the family of Jesse, and was compelled again and again to reject the convictions or prepossessions of his own mind as to the chosen future king of Israel, and at length was guided, under God's immediate direction, to select the youthful David as the anointed of the Lord, so only by waiting for

the appointed sign, and not otherwise, could John have the assurance that Jesus of Nazareth was the great Messiah, and that to him was due accordingly the reverent homage of all hearts.

By this event Christ's solemn entry upon his mediatorial work on earth was to be publicly announced from heaven. Thus was he to be openly instituted into his great office, before the eyes of the church, the church both in heaven and here below. Instituted thereinto he had been, in the eternal covenant, before the foundations of the earth were laid; and now, in the fulness of time, as promised through all ages, he appeared in the world in that nature in which, being endowed by the Spirit, he might fulfil the whole conditions required for the recovery of the lost, and for the re-establishment of the throne of God among men. Little as it was esteemed by that generation, with few exceptions, in the event now passing a glorious, mysterious transaction was witnessed,—a transaction more glorious than any in a universe filled with the wonders of God. Behold here the ETERNAL WORD incarnate,—behold the SPIRIT, descending and abiding on him,—behold the FATHER, with audible voice, proclaiming his title, and summoning men of every name to render submission to his word: behold the TRIUNE JEHOVAH thus made manifest; the eternal councils revealed; heaven, earth, and hell being the witnesses! Thus was celebrated the public consecration and the institution into office of the ever-blessed Mediator. The celebration was not in the temple. Once the cloud filled that house, and the Shechinah rested on the mercy-seat within its holy

place. Then and there God's presence was vouchsafed. But the things which were seen on that high occasion were only the carnal shadows of the grand reality,—of the heavenly things now revealed. The shadows were, in the first instance, connected with the tabernacle in the wilderness, afterwards with the temple at Jerusalem, being introduced there by the gorgeous ceremonial presided over by the great king. Now the substance,—the "better thing" than the shadows,—was revealed also in the wilderness, the wilderness of Judea, on the shore of Jordan; and, subsequently, after the wilderness time was accomplished, that substance was introduced into heaven itself, the Temple above. Then the everlasting gates lifted up their heads, and the King of glory entered within the sacred portals. Truly may it be said to us, ever ready as we are to judge by sense and not to see by faith, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

1. In the solemn transaction thus related may be seen the living relation which Christ holds to all his spiritual members.

We contemplate him endowed with the Spirit to "perfect" him,—to qualify him for executing all his mediatorial offices,—we contemplate him endowed after the manner described, as the one Mediator. Such qualification, in such form, he was capable of receiving, through the mysterious union of the two natures which constitute his person. By his own eternal Spirit he offered himself unto God. To that eternal Spirit (his own essential nature) he assumed humanity, that both, his one person,

might be offered. Upon this person,—true God and true man,—the Spirit, who filleth the heaven and the earth, as he had endowed him from the womb, came specially now, and abode upon him in the plenitude of his glory. It is the prerogative of the Mediator to have the Holy Ghost resting and abiding on him fully, and not by measure. In his case such a distinction could exist. In asserting this truth, we speak not of the Spirit in his essential union with the Son, in his relation to him as proceeding from him and the Father, and, therefore, as ever present with him; we speak not of the consubsistence of the three persons, but we speak of the gift of the Spirit to the Son in his subordinate capacity, as the servant of God and the Saviour of men; we declare that of which Isaiah sang when he said, "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." The Spirit, so communicated, worketh in him as the *Head*, in behalf of the members, all divine graces and virtues. The members receive the Spirit in their measure, but only as they are of the Head, in whom alone he resides, that he may ever communicate supplies to them. The beloved disciple saw in vision the tree of life, with its rich fruit and healing foliage, growing on each side of the pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the *throne*, the river proceeding from it, the throne occupied as John saw it, we may see an emblem of the Father, Son, and

Holy Ghost, in council, purpose, co-operation, and imparted energy, at once the origin and channel of all blessings to all creatures. In the TREE OF LIFE embracing that river, —its roots sent into and beneath the stream, its branches reaching to the farther side, and setting down there,—so embracing the river in all its course, itself yet being within the reach of every passer by,—in the TREE we may see an emblem of Jesus receiving the Spirit without limit, that they who partake of him (and who may not do this?), who partake of his fruit, may partake of all the fulness of God by his Spirit. To us the Spirit must ever be the Spirit of *Christ*. We are endowed by him with grace only when we have Christ,—only when we sit down under Christ's shadow with great delight, only when Christ's fruit is sweet to our taste. If we have not "the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his." Oh, remember this! The grace of eternal life is of the Spirit; but only in Christ, and through our union to him, can we have it,—a union produced and maintained instrumentally by the living faith which accepts the testimony of Jesus and appropriates him. Thus the dead soul is quickened, thus it is inflamed from above, and thus the hallowed fire, once lighted, continues to burn on the altar of the sanctified heart.

2. Here is seen also what Christ, viewing him as thus endowed, is to his people.

(1.) *What he is to them in his operations by the Spirit.* The dove is the emblem of those operations in their special character. Nothing dreadful, surely, nothing calculated to scare or repel can be in Christ's work. "I am meek and lowly in heart," are his own words; "Learn of

me," for of such a nature I am. Yes! meek, harmless, loving, as the gentle dove, to them that come to him, for he is "the Lamb of God." What encouragement is there in this could we receive it, did not our enemy, our unbelief, and our corruption, obscure the light of everlasting truth, —did they not, as so often happens, shut out from our view our Lord in the excellence of his grace.

(2.) *What he is in his offices.* The dove is again the emblem. He is himself, indeed, the ARK, but he is also the messenger of peace who dwells there. In him we behold the security for our souls, amidst the troubled waters of God's righteous judgments; but in him, as well as in those who speak in his name, we behold also the dove with its olive branch, publishing the truth of the floods of wrath assuaged, of peace on earth, and glory in heaven,—all in him, and through faith in his name.

(3.) *What he is in the results of his bestowed grace.* He does not make his people offensive, injurious, destructive. The emblem of the image which he produces in their souls is not found in any bird of prey, but in the dove! LOVE is the characteristic of the renewed nature, love to God, love to man. PURITY is also its characteristic. It sins not; it is without spot, and blameless; it does good, and communicates. Even as Christ himself was, so is this nature; and in the measure in which it predominates, we have been changed into his image—we are blessed, and are made blessings.

The river which John saw in vision was a *pure* river. It is so as contrasted with all others offered to our taste, and for our acceptance. All streams, even of

lawful enjoyment, are polluted, through the corruption which is in our nature. Though originally intended to be, in their own place, the occasion of legitimate satisfaction and pure delight, sin in us has changed their entire character, has made them turbid and vile, has blackened and poisoned them. Now, whatever those streams may be, whether corporeal or mental, whether personal or social, they are the sources of danger to the soul. So uniformly true is this, that every man who seeks to obey the injunction, "Keep thine heart with all diligence," trembles whilst he partakes. Like the dogs of Egypt, which, from terror of the monsters lurking in the river that gladdens that fruitful land, dare not stand to drink of it, but run at rapid speed, whilst they lap with hasty motion the inviting element; so the "wise in heart," conscious of the risks connected with the participation of earthly pleasures, fear indulgence, remembering that "at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." The Spirit of God is a pure and holy spirit. His blessings and comforts are pure and holy, as they are also purifying and sanctifying. The effect of his grace in this lost world is to expel impurity, with all the wretchedness which it entails, and to establish purity, that "peace may be as a river, and righteousness as the waves of the sea." This is the influence sent forth to cleanse the world, that it may become the residence of God again. "That which defileth shall in no wise" be where he is; and in the waters which John saw, as well as in the clean dove, we behold the emblem of the powerful agency by which all things are to be made new. Let this pure stream come on the

pollutions of this world, and how will they disappear! Let it be introduced into, let it mingle with and pervade all streams from which men drink (from which they drink to their ruin), and what a blessed change; what a healing of those waters; what a purging away of their filth; what a superseding of them; what a perfecting of holiness in the fear of the Lord! "I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

Let these waters come into any man's heart; let the nature of the dove be there; let the waters have free progress, and how will they remove the inherent vileness! That this grace should come by the gospel is the great object, even that men should be made partakers of the Spirit. Without this, the gospel is a dead letter. O cry for the "demonstration of the Spirit." If even Eden must have become a garden of weeds,—the seat of disorder, unfruitfulness, and evil,—wanting its river, what must our souls be without the indwelling and saving power of the Holy Ghost!

BEHOLD THE LAMB.

"Again, the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!"—John i. 35, 36.*

The Baptist's testimony to the glory of his Lord was very decided. From the consequences as bearing on his own position, he did not withhold himself; he boldly encountered them; he was faithful and made full proof of his ministry. His announcements in regard to Jesus were not of a character which could be palatable to the great body of his hearers, and he could not, therefore, but anticipate the diminution of his influence, and an unfavourable change in his relations to many who had hitherto attached themselves to him. In as far as his doctrine proved acceptable, its effect must have been to turn away the multitudes from himself, and to make them the followers of another; in as far as it offended the preconceived opinions of his followers, and disappointed their earthly expectations of the Messiah and of his reign, it must have deprived him of their favour and countenance. Both causes seem immediately to have operated, and from this time forward, the congregations which previously had been attracted and retained by the eloquence

* Preached on a Communion Sabbath.

of this great and powerful preacher, melted away, and became small and unimportant. As illustrating this fact, the verses before us record, that "on the day following" that on which he had spoken so unequivocally of the glory of the person of the humble Jesus of Nazareth, John stood with only two of his disciples. They constituted, on that occasion, the whole assemblage which had come to him. The multitudes were no longer there. John knew that Jesus must increase, and that he himself must decrease; he knew that though he had been a burning and a shining light, in which for a time men had been content to rejoice, he must wane before the bright illumination of that Sun which had now arisen; and as the friend of the bridegroom he rejoiced, whatever the natural feelings were which strove within him. In his whole character he continued to be to his Lord all that he had previously been: in zeal for his interests, as warm; in love to his cause, as devoted; in faithfulness to the testimony which had his glory as its chief end, as upright. Two only of the many disciples who had hung on his lips in past times were now present, but to this limited audience he showed himself, in behalf of Christ, the same single-hearted minister which the largest assemblages had ever found him. To them, as they stood with him on this occasion, whilst Jesus approached and passed by, he exclaimed, directing their attention to him, "Behold the Lamb of God!" What the saving fruit of his previous witness-bearing of the same kind had been, we are not informed, but the sequel instructs us how effectual the present testimony (the *fourth* of the series which we have traced) was

made, and how important, as bearing on the future interests of the church of the living God, the results proved. Here, unquestionably, was the beginning of great events.

Ere we pass to the consideration of these, let us hear ourselves, in the words addressed to the two disciples of the Baptist, invited anew to stand still and contemplate the great sight on which he sought to concentrate their attention. And when we do so, let us inquire, I. *What we are to see when we look on Jesus;* and, II. *For what ends we are to contemplate the object set before us.*

I. WHAT WE ARE TO SEE WHEN WE LOOK ON JESUS.

Need I premise by reminding you with what eyes you are to look on him? Time was when men were permitted to see the Lord with their natural eyes. They knew him after the flesh. When that was the only vision, when spiritual vision was wanting, they discerned no beauty in him, they saw no comeliness to make him desirable. He was an offence to them, a root out of a dry ground. Another time is to come when "every eye shall see him;" and then, too, if still of the character which erewhile belonged to them, they will "mourn because of him," trembling in prospect of the infliction of his wrath. To us in our present circumstances no such opportunity as in the first of these conditions existed is given, and the time for the second form of vision has not yet come: not, therefore, with our natural eyes, nor as it shall be in our immortal state of being, are we invited to behold the Lamb of God.

In heaven, the just made perfect see him with glorified

eyes, with the vision of spirits, as the angels do which are before the throne. The saints are associated with them in that honour, as they form part of the adoring throng which stand in presence of the throne. It is not the privilege of saints on earth to enjoy the blessing of such vision. To see with glorified eyes awaits them: that is to come, and will come, for the veil which now shuts us out from the contemplation of the heavenly glory, and which demands the power of faith to penetrate it, will be removed. God grant that in all of us this great thing may be accomplished, and that though now we "see him not," as he is seen in heaven, we may in due time be permitted to behold his face there!

A vision, however, meanwhile belongs to us,—inferior, indeed, to that which is enjoyed above, for "now we see darkly as through a glass, then we shall see face to face," yet most precious, more precious in our present condition than the vision by natural eyes could be, for it is written, "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." The eye of faith—for of that we speak—is the rich gift of God's grace. To receive that gift is to have sight given to the blind,—to have the soul, in all its faculties, opened to the perception and enjoyment of God in the glory revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus endowed, having not seen, we love him; and though now we see him not, we rejoice in him. Thus endowed, to us is applicable such precious truths as he himself uttered, when he said, "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

By faith, then, the sight which we are called to see must be contemplated. We ask, "*What is the sight?*" It is,—

1. *The Great Creator.*

John opens his gospel, as we have seen, with that revelation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Similar to this is the doctrine of all Scripture. "By him," as the "first-born of every creature," "were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." He it is from whom our natural life is derived, and in his hands also are our times; with him rest all the arrangements of our outward condition: in short, the universal government in heaven and on earth is his. With him we have to do, as according to his pleasure, and for his pleasure, we are and were created. This glory faith is called to behold in the "Lamb of God."

2. *The Great Creator manifested in the flesh.*

Here we have the most unsearchable wonder of all God's wonderful works,—that by which he makes himself known in his glory as he does by no other work; the infinite and the finite united in one; eternity matched with time; the Creator and the creature appearing in one person. It is not the Father assuming flesh, and not the Holy Ghost, but the WORD. He who was before all things, and by whom all things consist, the Son, takes to himself, not "the nature of angels, but the seed

of Abraham,"—his distinct personality in the unity of the Godhead remaining without change, continuing to be what it had been from eternity, and what it shall abide for ever and ever. This glory, also, faith is to behold in the "Lamb of God," whilst it traces all his history from the hour that he lay in the manger at Bethlehem, onward to that blessed occasion when, nigh unto Bethany, and in presence of his assembled disciples, he ascended in majesty to the throne of his glory, as he passed through the veil of the visible heavens into the cloud which received him out of their sight. This great wonder, we say, faith is to behold, whilst it dwells on the divine wisdom, love, and mercy therein displayed.

3. *The divine fulness for the salvation of men.*

This, also, is included in the testimony of the previous part of the gospel. Upon the person of the "Word made flesh" the Spirit descended and remained, the Father giving witness to him by the voice which came from heaven. That Spirit of God who fills heaven and earth had, in the person of Jesus Christ, that on which he might remain, not partially or in measure, as in the case of saints, but fully, in all the extent of his infinite greatness; and that, also, to abide in which was to him no grief, but perfect delight. Faith thus contemplates the incarnate Word publicly instituted into the mediatorial office, publicly set apart and consecrated by the solemn transaction so minutely detailed. It contemplates him thus endowed and qualified for the execution of all that was to be demanded of him according to the will of the Father, in terms of the everlasting covenant.

In connection with the important transaction of his institution on earth into the office of Mediator, all the blessed Redeemer's history in the world is to be viewed. It was when thus consecrated that he entered properly on the course of vicarious sufferings and obedience which terminated on Calvary; as it was then he entered also, in one view of it, on that reign which shall terminate only after he has gathered all his people to their home above, at which period he shall resign the kingdom into the hands of Him from whom he accepted it: then the mediatorial government shall be no longer necessary, and shall therefore cease, that God may be all in all.

So contemplated, faith sees in the person of Christ the full expiation for sin. His life was given for the life of his elect people: his obedience to the law was in their room. It beholds his expiation and obedience accepted of God, as most honourable to him and to his righteous government. It sees the righteousness of God declared in that expiation and obedience as in no other way it could be, whilst it rejoices that in Christ dwells the divine fulness for pardon, for mercy, for acceptance with God, for adoption, and for the spirit of adoption, which we, if we are saved, must receive.

So contemplated, also, in him faith sees treasured up all the grace which is to be communicated to his saints. It is the grace with which, as Mediator, he himself is endowed by the Holy Ghost: that which resides in him as living water in the perennial fountain. He is the head from which the members are supplied,—the stem which feeds all the branches. Him the Spirit, by whom

he is himself endowed, glorifies, in receiving of that very fulness which has been communicated to himself without measure, again to be bestowed on the saints. The grace comes not direct from that blessed Spirit to us as it did to Jesus, but from Jesus by the agency of the same Spirit, who makes it ours according to the measure of the gift. Through union to Jesus by the faith which is the work of the Spirit, through adherence to him, abiding in him, with full purpose of heart cleaving unto the Lord, —all our need is richly supplied.

Believers thus have grace for grace. To them Christ is "righteousness;" a "quickening spirit;" the "resurrection and the life;" the renewer of their spirit; the magnet which, having been applied to them all over, communicates to them its own nature with all its virtues. Whatever they were previously, now they yield themselves to God as alive from the dead. In their own degree they serve him as Christ also served,—the graces in them being the counterpart of the graces dwelling in him. Though the reflection of the glory of God, in what they are and what they do, be, indeed, as that of the dew-drop when it reflects the image of the orb of day, as compared with the expansive reflection of the same image by the boundless surface of the mighty ocean, nevertheless, such reflection there is, so that in them truly the power of God appears, and is made manifest to the world.

In Jesus, therefore, as "the Lamb of God," faith is summoned to behold that divine fulness from which only our supplies come,—supplies necessary for living and dying, for obeying and suffering, for enduring tempta-

tion and triumphing over it, and for the progressive purification of the soul, up to its ultimate perfect conformity to the likeness of God, and perfect meetness for his presence. In one word, in him it sees that grace which is glory begun.

II. For what ends we are to contemplate the object set before us.

1. *That we may have tenderness of heart under sin.*

You complain that you have a "hard and stony heart;" that your affections are benumbed and stupified by sin; that, do what you may, your hearts will not melt. Here is a sight for hard hearts. Look hither and behold "the Lamb of God." Consider, believe, apply what, by the word now before you, you are called to see, believe, and apply, and if your heart relent not, nothing can avail. The promise is, "They shall look to me whom they have pierced, and mourn." See him "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," as a "sheep dumb" before her shearers. Consider that, though he knew no sin, he was made sin for you, that you might be made the righteousness of God in him. He did endure misery,—in all the circumstances of his life, for he was a man of sorrows in every part of his history,—as well as in his agony in the garden, and in the pains of the accursed tree. Here is no fancy—no fable. Christ's suffering was the greatest reality in the whole history of the world. No created mind ever comprehended, no created mind can comprehend it, in its nature or extent. And for whom did he endure? For you and such as you: certainly it was not for himself. It was for every one now

present, in a sense to lay us all, without exception, under obligation to submit ourselves, to be subdued, to be melted, and to turn unto God. It was for some of us to such effect, that he has practically delivered us from wrath, in the liberty of which condition we now rejoice. What love was here could we apprehend its reality! Who would have endured such misery for you as Christ did? Would your father, or your wife, or your friend, have borne for you even one hour of such misery as his when his sweat was as great drops of blood? Nay, even for your dearest child you would not take one mouthful of such a cup as Christ drank to the dregs for you, when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Ah! how he loved thee! The rocks rent asunder when he suffered! Nature clothed herself in sackcloth! Harder than the rocks our hearts must be if they melt not, if they are not moved to tenderness, under a sense of the evil of sin thus manifested. Look, then, to him and mourn. "Behold the Lamb of God" till "your eyes become a fountain of tears." Surely, thereafter, you will never think lightly of sin. When water was brought to David to drink, which had been obtained from the well of Bethlehem at the risk of the blood of his servants, he refused to partake of it, and poured it out before the Lord. That water had cost the risk of common blood: your sins have cost the actual shedding of the "precious blood of Christ." Will you, can you think lightly of them? Will you abide, can you abide by your previously cherished lusts? Will you walk untenderly, carelessly, or as if sin were a matter of indifference? How be-

coming was the state of mind of Peter under his convictions, how becoming his prostration, when he went out and wept bitterly after the eye of Him whom he had pierced had been turned on him. Does not such sorrow and humiliation become you, and ought it not to follow a right view of "the Lamb of God?" Ah! of what importance is it to have broken hearts! The broken heart welds into Christ and cleaves to him. The bleeding graft takes vital hold of the bleeding tree. "Behold the Lamb of God,"—then you will melt, then you will trust in him with your whole soul.

2. *That we may have relief under saving conviction of sin.*

Has your heart been made to mourn? Has the rock smitten yielded its precious treasure? Has your head become waters, and your eyes "a fountain of tears?" Do you cry, "O wretched man that I am!" "God be merciful to me a sinner!" "What shall I do?" Then, "BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD." Whether it be the thought of your guilt, or of your pollution, or of your spiritual bondage, or of your universal unworthiness that oppresses you, "behold" Him. If he can take away "the sin of the world," he can take away a world of sin in you. He is the propitiation for our sins,—even for the sins of "the whole world." Him hath the Father sealed. As our passover he has been sacrificed for us. He now appears before God for us. He is there at this moment, as a lamb that had been slain, bearing in his person the evidences of his past death, presenting these tokens before God as an irresistible plea that you should be

forgiven, accepted, and blessed, when you cry to him for it. Behold this, and despond no more. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin:" "it speaketh better things than the blood of Abel." Whatever may be your sorrow under a sense of sin, whatever your misgivings, lift up your eyes and behold the Lamb; so shall you be drawn to him and drawn from sin; so shall you be brought into conformity to his image; so shall you be transformed by the renewing of your mind; and, being healed by him, you shall ever follow him, giving glory to God.

3. *That we may have courage and patience under all suffering.*

Though you have been made tender of heart, and though you have been saved by grace, you are not above Him through whom all such good has been accomplished for you. As he was in the world, so you must anticipate that you shall be. It is reasonable that you should expect to be baptized with his baptism, and reasonable that you should expect to drink of his cup,—never has it been otherwise,—at all times such has been the experience of his redeemed people. This great difference, however, has always existed:—the Master's experience was the endurance of the wrath of God,—the saints' has been but the endurance of the wrath of man. What comparison can we institute between the two forms of suffering?—there can be none. Shall *we* shrink then from that which is laid upon us? We, who deserved hell, shall we refuse *this* baptism,—this cup? Shall we make an outcry? shall we rebel under it? Ah, "Behold the Lamb of God" and

be still! His blood, how precious, yet how cheerfully was it shed! His sufferings were from the hand of infinite divine wrath, yet how patiently were they endured! He opened not his mouth. Behold and see that great sight. Whilst you look, ask, entreat, that grace may be communicated,—grace for grace, and he will do it for you. His sheep are ever counted "slaughter sheep;" and he has not concealed from them that they are so. Let it be enough for them to know that they are like him; that they suffer with him; that they are kept from denying him; that hereafter they will rejoice with him; that meanwhile he preserves them; and that amidst the whole infliction of evil to which they are subjected, not a bone of them, after all, shall be broken. That was literally true of himself, for his body awaited a speedy resurrection: it is mystically true of his people in all their sufferings. Their wounds do not cause corruption, neither do they occasion injury to their hope, nor do they mar their present pleasantness to God and profitableness to man, whilst a speedy escape from them all is at hand.

4. *That we may not stagger at the promises through unbelief.*

Alas, how liable are we to suspicions and distrust. God's faithfulness, God's willingness, God's power, are all equally called in question. To banish evil of such a nature, "behold the Lamb of God." The promises are fulfilled in him. What in all God's promises was so precious as that Christ should be given, that he should come, that he should dwell with man in very deed upon the earth, that he should accomplish his great work? That has been done. He has

come. In him every word previously written of the long-expected Messiah has been fulfilled. Not one word of all that God had spoken has failed. In every case of tribulation then, great or small, "behold the Lamb of God." What an interest have you to do this! Angels have not such an interest to do it as you, though they are sustained by him, though they ever see his face, and though they ever admire his glory. If in obstinacy you decline, or if in apathy you neglect to look to him, then your sin is that you have "eyes to see, but you see not:" *that* condemnation rests on you. It were better that you had never been so endowed,—better that you had been like the beasts that perish, or like the plants or stones of the field, than that all your opportunities of knowing Christ and of sharing in his grace should have been vouchsafed, and should have been cast away on you. Awake, arise from the dead, and he will yet give you light. And ye who have come to this light, rejoice in it. Let it shed its brightness on all your darkness. Rejoice in the LORD. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their KING.

Dear friends, does not such mercy,—such love and grace,—demand that we should become the Lord's; that we should present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, our reasonable service? Is it not due that our sinful nature should be mortified, crucified at God's command? What would Abraham have been, as his servant, had tenderness of heart for Hagar and for his much-loved Ishmael counteracted God's authority when God required their being sent away? Or what would Joshua have been, as his servant, had political

considerations weighed with him, and had he, for the sake of appearances in the presence of enemies, spared Achan, and passed by his transgression? Saul spared Amalek, and lost his kingdom. Many spare what God has devoted to destruction, and perish by so doing. Our "bodies"—the whole man—God is entitled to,—entitled to have set apart and sanctified to himself; that as the legal sacrifices when presented by the offerers were no longer their property, but became the property of God, to be used for his glory and in his service,—so should we be his. "Living sacrifices" we must be—alive through our union to Christ, and through participation of his life,—"lively stones," as being built upon the living foundation, and as constituting part of the living Temple. "Holy" sacrifices we are called to be as well as "living,"—holy, not only as being set apart especially for God, but as being really worthy of such blessed distinction, as being "without blemish," and perfect of our kind. How many things are there in professors of religion of each of which it may be said to them,—"That does not become you as being of God's people, that sentiment which you cherish, that language which you indulge in, that example which you set to others,—these are spots and blemishes which vitiate your sacrifice, and make it unfit for the altar." They who are Christ's shall in the end be without spot and blemish; and in the meantime they are summoned to aim at this character. To them a double duty is prescribed. As the patriarch of old was required to prepare and lay out his sacrifice, so are they: but as he was required, when that duty was done, and when he then waited for God, to

watch the sacrifice which he had laid out, to guard it against the unclean fowls, which, under shelter of the shadows of the evening, approached on noiseless wing to pollute it by their presence; as he was required to occupy himself incessantly in driving away the undesired visitors, so of the people of God similar services are demanded: they must see to it, that the offering of themselves in holiness which they present to God shall be kept holy and untainted, kept for God: in short, that they shall keep themselves in his love. The duty is imperative, and grace will be given to perform it. It is their "reasonable service." That we should hold such a relation to God as is thus implied is becoming; it is not becoming that we should hold any other. It is not becoming that we should be devoted to ourselves, that we should live for self-gratification, or for the service of any idol whatever. It is dishonouring to him that the case should be so; and he receives the honour due to him only when we are his as living and holy sacrifices. Moreover, it is becoming to ourselves,—"it is reasonable" in that sense, —that we should give to God the place which the consideration of his mercy in Christ demands. One end for which the "Lamb of God" was slain from the foundation of the world was to reconcile God to men; but another was to reconcile men to God,—was so to transform them, that to their souls his service should be "reasonable service," "honourable work," and "a delight." They who give themselves up to evil passions, to earthliness, to avarice, to undue cares, to ungodliness of any kind, are truly without understanding. Such old leaven must be

purged away; but a right relation to God, through Jesus Christ, can alone effect it.

How blessed to think that his holy people are "acceptable" to him in their persons, in their worship, and in their services! Noah's first sacrifice, in the new world, was unto God a sacrifice of "a sweet-smelling savour." It was so, as giving token that the earth from which it ascended was his, and as being an earnest that all on the earth should in the end be his,—also holiness unto him. The same thing is true of the members of Christ's body. They are not as yet perfect; but there is in them the principle of future perfection. They are Christ's as being now partakers of his person and of all his benefits, and they shall at length reach their full measure of grace and glory. Therefore they are a grateful sacrifice unto God; they are the sons of God; now—brethren of the First-born; in the end they shall be wholly like him, and shall ever see him as he is. Amen.

THE FIRST TWO DISCIPLES.

"And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day; for it was about the tenth hour."—John i. 37–39.

The Baptist's doctrine was the same whatever might be the character of his audience,—the same with the great multitude who had recently hung on his lips, and with the two individuals of whom our text speaks. It was doctrine most meet for his disciples. In his proper office John was a preacher of repentance. The word was in his hands as a "hammer." His mission, in its spirit, was like the strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire, which preceded the still small voice that spake to Elijah; but it included the spirit of that voice also. God was in the still small voice: he was in that which preceded, but he was especially in it. His utterance in this voice conveyed his mind. The terrors of the law were John's proper theme, though not so exclusively; for the law alone was not to be the means of conversion. By the law, however important its service, the heart was not to be gained to

God, but by another testimony it was. John well knew it, and as an able minister, virtually of the new testament, not of the letter but of the Spirit, he unequivocally published the great doctrine of the kingdom of God. "This is he of whom I said unto you, He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for he was before me:" "Behold the Lamb of God!" Never has any soul been drawn to God, and made an heir of eternal life, but by the doctrine which exhibits Christ. John never failed to teach consistently with a truth so vital. It was the Master's own unvarying, faithful proclamation to sin-destroyed man. "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me:" "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so shall the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

The saving effect of the proclamation of Christ, as the great sacrifice for sin, is in the hands of God, and is always the fruit of his sovereign power and grace; this he delights at all times to make manifest by infallible proofs. Accordingly, it often happens that the word which is of no effect at one time becomes mighty at another. Of the fruit of John's preaching, when he was surrounded by crowds, we are not told, though there is every reason to conclude that it was abundant; but we are made to see clearly divine influence vouchsafed when he speaks to the solitary individuals named in our text. "They heard him speak!" Yes, but they had heard him in like manner often before. Now they "heard" with power. Now their hearts were touched. Now they were subjected to an influence which wrought faith and

drew forth its exercise,—an influence new as well as full of power in them. For this influence let us ever look; to this influence let us ever direct our eyes; upon it let us implicitly depend.

We now consider,—I. *The fruit of the grace of God in these two disciples;* and, II. *Christ's treatment of them.*

I. THE FRUIT OF THE GRACE OF GOD IN THESE TWO DISCIPLES.

1. *They followed Jesus.* When he himself began to preach, to follow him, literally, was a very frequent result of his ministrations. Parties addressed rose up, left all, and went after him. He did not in the case before us speak by his own lips, but John by his authority spake his word, and the result was the same. The two who heard quitted John's side and followed Jesus.

When a man has received ears to hear what the Spirit speaks,—when he has become, not only a hearer, but a doer of the word, he ever seeks increased knowledge. Saving knowledge necessarily includes, as its first and paramount subject, the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Such convictions of his excellent glory are wrought in the soul that more is sought. Apprehended of the Spirit, the awakened man cannot now rest satisfied with any partial view, but he pants after full discoveries of all that Christ is; and thus he enters on a course which can find its proper termination only in presence of the throne in heaven. "The path of the just is as the shining light, it shineth more and more unto the perfect day." They that are of this character "go from strength to strength

unwearied, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." To them belongs the promise, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." His going forth is prepared as the morning; and to them he shall come as the rain, as the latter and the former rain on the earth. They are introduced, indeed, into the enjoyment of true communion; they are brought also to walk in the way of life and in his steps; but in the first instance they are made to know him. Whatever as yet might have been the faith of these two disciples,—whatever its intelligence, its strength, and spirituality,—they so far believed the word spoken by the Baptist as to desire intensely increased knowledge. They were drawn in their hearts to "the Lamb of God."

Ah, if this result has not been produced in us by the hearing of the truth which refers to that great theme, the gospel has been of none effect, the grace of God has hitherto been in vain! If the grand purpose of our lives has not become to grow in the knowledge of God our Saviour, we have not yet been made partakers of him, nor have we tasted his preciousness. If he is not perceived in his attractive glory in all that we read, all that we listen to in his house, and study at home, the effect being that we follow him with a growing thirst to have him more entirely as our exclusive inheritance, such power as came on the two disciples has not come on us. Moses, after all the discoveries which God had been pleased to make to him of his great majesty and mighty power, after seeing his wonders at the Red Sea, in the wilderness, and on Sinai, even then prayed for knowledge as though he had

hitherto known nothing of the divine excellence. "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," he said; and he could not have asked more if that glory had never been revealed to him at all. The Spirit who gave the desire which dictated that prayer in the case of Moses, also wrought in the two disciples when they heard from John's lips the words, "Behold the Lamb of God," and he moved them to arise and follow Jesus. Has the same life from God, let us ask, entered into, and in like manner moved us?

2. *They acknowledged his high character as a Master on whose instruction they desired to wait.* Their knowledge of Jesus hitherto was derived wholly from John's teaching; their faith in him rested on John's testimony. They had understood that testimony to declare the superiority of Jesus to him who uttered it,—his superiority to Moses,—his superiority to all created intelligences. Whatever the outward form under which the Saviour appeared, —and, as we have said, no doubt it was such as to be an offence to the multitudes,—they received the truth as it had been spoken. They did not follow him to whom the Baptist had directed their attention, as if they were in doubt as to his pretensions, or with the intention to inquire into his claims; but they addressed him confidently, in some right understanding and faith, calling him "Rabbi." In so designating him, they employed a term of the highest respect; their intention being, however, not to offer a general homage to his person, but to express a special recognition and acknowledgment of him, in the character in ascribing which to him John had sought to declare his glory.

Their confidence in him, as the Great Teacher who was to come from God, and for whom all professed to look, was not concealed. It appeared in the course which they adopted, when they forsook the master to whom they owed so much, and in their expressed desire to know the place of the abode of him whom they had now chosen and had begun to follow. Neither was their secret conviction of ignorance and need of increased illumination in divine things concealed. Much light had come on them through John's teaching, but they evidently felt that they had "not attained." All that they had hitherto received was but preparatory to that which Jesus was to give. The subsequent context shows their exultation in the thought that they had found the Messiah. Having been faithful to previous communications of knowledge, having carefully treasured and faithfully employed the riches of grace in the measure in which they had hitherto been imparted to them, they were now in circumstances to welcome the heavenly instructor, and to be endowed directly from his own hand. In short, we have every reason to believe that they were able to appreciate the distinction which John was so eager to establish as a cardinal truth in the minds of all his hearers, that whereas he himself baptized with water only, Jesus should baptize with the Holy Ghost. For this the two disciples longed. That they might obtain the whole good involved in that baptism they followed the Lamb.

It does, indeed, mark a blessed progress when the issue of outward preaching is to make men desire that internal teaching which is by the saving power of Christ;

when baptism with water creates the sincere and earnest desire for baptism by the Holy Ghost; when we go from the former to obtain the latter from Jesus himself. What grateful emotions of heart, on the part of John, must there have been when he saw such fruit of his ministry. These two men were now obeying the whole spirit of his doctrine. They were gone to Him to introduce them to whom was the Baptist's great work. Perhaps the most ecstatic moment of his ministerial experience was that when his eyes thus fell on Andrew and John (our evangelist) joining themselves as disciples to the great Lord of the church. And what grateful emotions are ever raised in the hearts of all true ministers, when through grace the effect of their preaching is such as this; when they have reason to believe or to hope, that their hearers go from them to address Jesus himself, to join themselves to him in a covenant never to be broken! John was the friend of the bridegroom, and as such he doubtless rejoiced. Those ministers are also the friends of the bridegroom, and to see them whom Christ has from eternity betrothed to himself arise and go after him to become his people indeed, according to the will of the Father, how blessed! Let this be seen in you,—in all to whom the word of this life comes that Christ may be glorified!

3. *They sought intimate acquaintance with him.* It was no such curiosity as that which animated Zaccheus that filled the hearts of Andrew and John. When Zaccheus was ultimately subdued by the same power of saving grace, and was placed under its blessed influence,

a similar result followed; but, in the first instance, he did not seek after Jesus on their principle. Their desire, from the instant the Baptist's word took hold of their hearts, was not merely to see Jesus, to gratify a carnal curiosity,—natural, it might be, yet partaking of no profitable character,—but to ascertain the place of his abode, that they might, if permitted, cultivate his acquaintance, dwell with him, enjoy his intimacy. When the Saviour, addressing Zaccheus in the sycamore tree, said, "To-day I must abide at thy house," forthwith his whole soul underwent a change,—a change which made the intimation that Jesus should "abide" with him his joy; but the grace which then, but not until that moment, wrought in him, had already wrought in Andrew and John; with desire, therefore, they desired the blessed privilege which was so freely offered to the converted publican, when they respectfully demanded, "Rabbi, where dwellest thou?" The question bespoke their renewed condition —it was suitable to it. No short interview was contemplated by them as what would suffice for their purpose. They neither expected nor desired that they should soon have done with Jesus. Their business was not in their estimation one which might be finished by a short conversation on the highway, nor did they anticipate that their communings were to be of a kind from which they should long to be set free. The shortest interviews with Christ did effect mighty works. It was on the occasion of a passing interview that he raised the widow's son, of another passing interview that he opened the eyes of blind Bartimeus, and of another that he gave

deliverance to the daughter of the woman of Canaan. But there were those who received blessings at his hand to whom such passing interviews could not avail for their purposes with him. Of them were all his disciples as a body; not only the twelve and the seventy, but such as the family at Bethany, and all of like heart and mind.

Whoever they be who obtain a saving knowledge of the Lord, who come to him because they are drawn of the Father, and who, therefore, come to have in him all for which the Father bestows him, they are not soon done with him,—they are never done with him. Theirs is not a mere fortuitous or market-place acquaintance; not that, therefore, which is to be confined to what may be called the civilities or formal courtesies following a common introduction, but the intimacy and all the enjoyment of family or relative friendship. They know where Christ dwells and where he is always to be found. There is a felt necessity for their knowing this, —a felt necessity that the relation to Christ, and the intimacy with him, shall not be one that includes no more than the possibility of casual, and, perhaps, only unfrequent and far separate meetings. Nothing can serve their purpose but such a position with regard to him as at once permits and welcomes free access at all times and on all occasions. "Where dwellest thou?"—in the glowing language of the Song: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?"

If no such intimacy with the beloved Jesus be desired

by us, there is cause to fear that our hearts have not been touched as they need to be. He has a dwelling-place on earth: he had it when those two disciples addressed themselves to him, and he has it now. Do we inquire after it, and is the place of reception for his beloved people well known to us? Its gates are never shut,—the glory of God is there,—its light is like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal! Have we found it? Is it our happy place of resort?

II. CHRIST'S TREATMENT OF THE TWO DISCIPLES.

1. *He took notice that they followed him.* From the narrative we conclude that he had passed the spot where they stood with John,—no communing having occurred with him and them as he went along. So did he pass the ship struggling amidst the tempest, and his disciples in apparent jeopardy: so did he make also as if he would pass the village of Emmaus, and separate himself from the two who travelled the road with him thither. Probably he had advanced a little, so that they were now out of his view. His countenance was not towards them, but in the opposite direction. Yet, though thus placed relatively to the party, he knew that Andrew and his friend were following him. He was not unconscious that virtue had gone out of him, and that they were now acting under its blessed influence.

You ask, why did he not speak to them? No doubt, the scene described in the text tells that he came to them (though the fact might not be apparent to themselves), as he came on a subsequent occasion to Levi

sitting at the receipt of custom; but to him he spake as he passed: in the case before us he passed and did not speak: why? you ask:—we answer, another had spoken in his name: the Baptist had spoken. As to the outward ordinance,—the call by the Word,—it was the same whether it was directly uttered by his own lips or pronounced by those of any of his servants. John had said, "Behold the Lamb of God," and the two disciples "followed him." That he did not himself call them, that he left this in the hands of his messenger, not only manifested the honour which he put upon the ordinary means, but likewise illustrated, that by those means faith comes,—the faith which he bestows, which he exercises, which he proves, which he owns, and which he rewards. Accordingly he had gone but a little way till "he turned and saw them following."

Let us assure ourselves, Christ knows them who are following him indeed, however hidden and silent, however feeble and faltering may be the step with which they do it. He himself has bestowed the light by which they walk,—the heart, the purpose which prompt them. Of him all is, and this work of his hands he will not forsake. The woman who touched the hem of his garment could not be hid from him,—she saw that she could not,—and neither can any be hid from Jesus, who, like her, are drawn to him,—who, like her, are compelled to seek him under a sense of the great necessity a consciousness of which a right knowledge of themselves creates. If you are of this character, and if under temptation you are saddened by the thought that, though you follow because called to it

by the Word, he is going from you, be assured it will not be long until he turn,—until he make you know that "his desire is towards you,"—until he make you know that the thoughts which he thinks towards you are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Be not discouraged. Anticipate this. Even when you may have grieved him, as Peter did, he will show forbearance and compassion. He will "turn again:" he will "turn to you:" he will "look on you," so that your heart shall melt and yield itself to his gracious power.

2. *He set them on examining their purpose in following him.* Christ met the approach of the two disciples, as if he were keeping them at a distance, with the question, "*What seek ye?*" They had not spoken. They might be travellers on the same path with himself; but he, as adverting to the fact that they followed him and that he knew it, by this question turned their thoughts on themselves. Why were they thus following him who had been announced to them as the Lamb of God?

Were their views carnal? Had they understood the doctrine of the Baptist concerning the kingdom in carnal apprehension of the glorious things which had been spoken? Were they under the influence of ambitious anticipations? Were they filled with the desire only "to sit one on the right hand and the other on his left in the kingdom of heaven?" Did the prospect of ease and earthly grandeur prompt their present course? Did they seek himself, or merely such advantages as they believed they might have through him? How great was

the distinction between the two things! Does the bride value the bridegroom to whom she has engaged herself for his own sake, or for the sake of what she is to become by him? To the bridegroom the truth on that head must needs be of important interest. If the bride's mind be set on the expected portion,—then should she be disappointed in her future history, and never realise her vain hopes, where will be the bond of affection? If she values the bridegroom for his personal qualities,—for what he is in himself,—the veneration of affection will never cease.

"*What seek ye?*" If it be not mere temporal benefits; if it be not that which may minister to the earthly, carnal, selfish principle of our nature, well; if it be not that which Christ can give us, but Christ himself in the first instance, Christ himself for his personal excellency,—Christ himself for what he is,—then it is well. All testimony of him by the Spirit sets forth the glory of his person, and with that also the glory of his great work of mediation. Showing these things to us, our hearts are gained to him. "What seek ye?" The children of Abraham are like Abraham. Christ himself is their joy and rejoicing; for they see him, and they see his day with the eye of faith. They are strangers and foreigners where he is not supreme. They confess that they seek a country,—a country not yet found by them,—and they are content, meanwhile, to have none: they are content to live upon the promises which point to the future good, and to hope in that which is to come. How necessary, in dealing with profession of adherence to Christ, whether on our own part or on the part of others, to test it with that

question, "What seek ye?" Is it not a duty which we owe to him, which we owe to his glorious cause, which we owe to ourselves, that we conceive of him as speaking solemnly to our souls ere we have yet committed ourselves, demanding that we shall ponder our position in making our approach to him on the invitation of his Word, and answer to him, and from our hearts, that question, "What seek ye?" He will not have us to pledge ourselves unadvisedly. "If any man will come after me, let him count the cost," we may hear him say; "let him not come to be disappointed; let him not come, that he may thereafter turn from following, and forsake me; let him see the cross, and be willing to take it up; let him also see the recompence of reward, and be content to have respect to it." It well-nigh produced a frightful catastrophe, that Zipporah too long persisted in knowing Moses, her husband, only as the hireling or friend of her father; not one moment too soon did she discover in him the great commanded deliverer of the people Israel, and was she made to know the necessity for her safety, and the safety of all who were dear to her that she should take up her cross, and that they should be together included in the everlasting covenant. It is one thing to know Christ after the flesh, another to know him after the Spirit,—one thing to have a dead profession, and another to be the subjects of a divine nature.

3. *He gave them most welcome invitation and grateful entertainment.* The reply to the above question on the part of the two disciples was to him entirely satisfactory. "Rabbi," said they, "where dwellest thou?" It told

the state of their heart, at once of their faith, and of their desire. And how did he respond? Did he give some complicate, some incomprehensible description of his dwelling-place? Did he with coldness of manner hand them his address? Did he express some general invitation to be accepted by them when their convenience permitted, either at that precise time or at some other? Was his bearing towards them such as to tell that in his heart beat no sympathetic response to the convictions existing in theirs,—convictions which prompted the proposal for intimacy of acquaintance,—the proposal which they had made on their first approach to him? No! "*Come and see,*" was his immediate and cordial reply; "be informed at once, and by myself, where ye shall find me. Come now, to-day, not to-morrow. Be assured, if it be in your heart to know where I dwell, much more it is in mine to reveal the place of my abode. Stay not, but arise and come away!" They went. He did not conduct them to a palace, certainly, nor to any scene of earthly splendour, nor to such gaiety of outward condition, in any sense, as might gratify the carnal eye. If his birth-place at Bethlehem, if his home at Nazareth, if the dwelling-places of his chief intimates in his own country were the rule from which we may infer the character of the lodging to which he now led the way, it must have been mean enough. Herod and Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas, had their palaces; many a son of luxury and worldly prosperity throughout the land, by his providential bounty fared sumptuously every day; but he had no home of his own. To some borrowed apartment he proba-

bly conducted his invited guests. It was homely, very homely; but he was there himself, and that must have satisfied such followers as those who now accompanied him. He who could change water into wine by a look could by his presence make the humblest hovel more glorious than any palace. Where he is, there beauty and blessedness, attraction and real enjoyment must necessarily be. So it proved to the two disciples. The day was too short for their business with Christ,—too short to gratify them in all that they desired. What remained of the day, when they had found his dwelling-place, was passed with him. The evening came too soon to separate them, if indeed it did separate them. Their intercourse was protracted enough, however, to fix their hearts, to make them unchangeably the willing servants of their freely chosen Lord; and ever after his friendship, fellowship, and presence were indispensable to their true peace.

"Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests," though many a time Christ's disciples, like himself, have not had where to lay their heads; but, being with him, and he abiding with them, though literally having nothing, they have ever possessed all things. Come, then, "come and see;" come taste, come drink, yea, come and drink abundantly, all ye beloved of him. His Word and Spirit call. As they call you, so will they show you where he is to be found. Following as they lead, you shall now be refreshed with all riches of grace, and in the end you shall be conducted to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; and there you shall be endowed with all riches in glory.

Brotherly love

THE CALL OF PETER.

"ONE OF THE TWO WHICH HEARD JOHN SPEAK, AND FOLLOWED HIM, WAS ANDREW, SIMON PETER'S BROTHER. HE FIRST FINDETH HIS OWN BROTHER SIMON, AND SAITH UNTO HIM, WE HAVE FOUND THE MESSIAS, WHICH IS, BEING INTERPRETED, THE CHRIST. AND HE BROUGHT HIM TO JESUS. AND WHEN JESUS BEHELD HIM, HE SAID, THOU ART SIMON THE SON OF JONA: THOU SHALT BE CALLED CEPHAS, WHICH IS BY INTERPRETATION, A STONE."—JOHN I. 40–42.

THE interview which Andrew and his fellow-disciple held with Jesus lasted the whole day,—probably from early morning till late at night. Receiving the testimony of the Baptist when he proclaimed him to be "the Lamb of God," they had followed him. By his most friendly invitation they became his guests, and thus enjoyed a valuable opportunity for blessed intercourse. Thus it happened that they were the first, after the Lord's entry on his public ministry, to hear, direct from his own lips, the "words of eternal life,"—a matter to be noted as of interest in all time to come. The verses now read afford an illustration of the power which was exerted at least over one of the two,—the effect of which was made manifest by the objects for which he began immediately to live.

They contain an account,—I. *Of Peter's call by the agency of his brother Andrew;* and, II. *Of the reception which Christ gave him.*

I. PETER'S CALL BY THE AGENCY OF HIS BROTHER ANDREW.

1. The relationship of Andrew and Peter, as well as their occupation,—that of fishermen,—is frequently alluded to in the Gospels. They dwelt, probably, at this time somewhere in the neighbourhood where John was teaching; and such opportunities as they could seize for hearing him they, in company with each other, gladly embraced. Thus Andrew was one of the two to whom the Baptist pointed out the person of Jesus as he passed. From such small beginnings, and from such apparently casual incidents as that here alluded to, have the great events in the history of the church frequently sprung.

2. "He findeth his own brother." This implies that Andrew had gone specially in search of Peter. Probably his companion, the other of the two disciples, had done the same; but "he first findeth him." After Andrew's interview with Christ, he did not return to the Baptist. He had then passed into a higher school than that of John. A higher tone of character than all the past already distinguished him, and his soul burned with desire to communicate to others that which he had himself discovered; he accordingly sought, and found, "his own brother Simon."

This may be all that is included in the language here employed, strictly interpreted; and yet I think there is warrant to believe that, though unconscious of it, he found Peter by Divine direction. Eliezer, the faithful servant of Abraham, was animated by most hearty desire to fulfil

his master's commission, when he went forth to seek the future wife of Isaac—in the first instance he was conscious of nothing more; and, like him, Andrew desired only to obey the principle of faithfulness which was strong in his heart. But Eliezer, in executing his trust, was, by special interference, taken under Divine direction. The God of Abraham guided his every step at the time when his soul contemplated only the upright discharge of his engagement as the servant of his earthly master. And Andrew was no less under the presiding power of Divine guidance in seeking his brother, though the one sentiment present to his mind was desire to make him a partaker of the good to which he had himself attained. Thus was the Divine counsel fulfilled.

It was Andrew's great blessing that he was permitted to speak first to Peter the things which he himself believed. Probably he was the younger, and the less noted of the two brothers; but in the sovereign arrangement of God he was made the instrument of instructing the other in the highest truth. It pleases God, sometimes, thus to manifest his will in bestowing good. Andrew was brought to Christ first before Peter; and on Andrew there was conferred by divine appointment the additional distinction of being the means of bringing Peter to the Lord.

How important a duty is it to exhort one another! They who are themselves partakers of Christ will surely have respect to it; being of his mind they cannot refrain from it. And most blessed it is when they do engage in such exercise that their hearts should be warmed by inter-

course with the Master himself. They may be younger than the friends whose good they seek, they may be inferior, in some respects, to those whom they address on the solemn subject of coming to Christ, and yet, if they do it in humility, do it unostentatiously and with faith, the Lord will accept the service, and he may render it effectual. Mean ones, comparatively, he can, and mean ones he often does, employ as instruments of doing good to the most eminent. Weak agents may be made use of to call and to conduct to Christ those who are vastly more excellent naturally, and more valuable than themselves. Andrew, in the case of his brother Peter, affords an example of this truth, and such an example as provides fair encouragement to all who would do good in attempting to commend Christ, however distrustful they may be of themselves,—distrustful because of their poor qualifications for such an office,—and particularly distrustful because of the natural superiority of those to whom they seek to convey the word of life.

3. "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." Such was the address with which Andrew met his brother when, having searched for Peter, he found him. To Jesus he, without hesitation, applied the name by which the future Saviour of the world was described in all the Old Testament,—the "Messiah," the "Anointed," the "Christ,"—a name which declared his institution in the everlasting covenant as the "one Mediator," and his full endowment for that office; which declared his eternal election according to the purpose of the Father, and his perfect qualification as the one source

of all needed good for this lost world.—"We have found the Messias:" we have made that discovery. Their first teacher, on whose ministrations they had with such satisfaction waited, had been proclaiming that "there stood one among them whom they knew not, and who, though coming after him, was preferred before him," magnifying his glory, and ever seeking to engage men's hearts and souls to him. Their eyes had been strained to make the discovery of his person, and hitherto they had failed. But success had at length crowned their efforts, and there was ignorance no longer. The great secret was known; they had found him whom, though previously they had not seen him, they loved through faith in the word which his servant had spoken.—"We have found the Messias." The great issue waited for in the dispensation of the law was the advent of Christ. His absence caused the imperfection which distinguished the system of ordinances that then formed the only provision of outward instrumentality to the Church. These were as planets which reflected the light of an unrisen sun. His appearance was essential to their perfection,—essential for proof that they had shined by his light and were of him,—that they were shadows to flee away when he appeared, and when the morning brightness arose. They served their appointed purpose only as being connected with the "day-spring from on high" the arrival of which was announced by the rejoicing Andrew to his brother.—"We have found the Messias." As associated with his advent, all good of every kind was expected. To find him, therefore, was to find life, was to find riches and honour; yea, durable riches and righteousness,—wealth

better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and revenue better than choice silver; in short, it was to find every thing included in the favour of the Lord, both the world which now is, and that which is to come. This Andrew had found; the "pearl of great price;" the "great gain" of free gift; all divine and human good.—"We have found the Messias." As the period approached when the appearing of the promised Deliverer was expected, according to the word of prophecy, the eager longings of believers increased. They "hastened towards his coming." They "waited for the consolation of Israel," for "the kingdom of God," as they do who watch for the morning. Peter was one of those who then might be justly represented as standing in such an attitude, his eye looked everywhere for the sign of his appearing, and Andrew, his brother, knew it. Andrew's whole soul was alive to the greatness of the discovery which he had himself made; under that influence he had sought Peter, and now he tells him that their mutual expectations have been at length fulfilled,—their desires gratified. Now they need no longer look to the future,—no longer ask, "Why is he so long of coming—wherefore does he tarry?" the much-desired one has revealed himself; he has been found of them who waited for him.

Andrew's zeal had a more precious origin than mere vanity,—vanity that so great a discovery had been made by him,—that he had been so instructed as to be enabled to discover the person of the Lord under the veil which concealed his glory. He had felt the power of saving grace. He knew the great Saviour "not after the flesh,"

but in "the power of his resurrection,"—in the power of a new life. A sense of God's love to him in Christ now most sensibly reigned within, and quickened every energy of his renewed nature. He knew in himself that he was healed, that he was a partaker of eternal life, that he was a partaker of every good and of every perfect gift. One sentiment only existed as to others. It was that they should be as he was,—that they, too, should find the Messias; and to "his own brother Simon," as the foremost in his affections and thoughts, he first of all communicated the truth which he had himself so cordially embraced. Shall we not go and do likewise?

4. "And he brought him to Jesus." No doubt all that Andrew could speak he did speak. He did it, at least, with earnestness and honesty, with a sincere and unselfish desire of being the instrument to bestow blessing. He may not have spoken with eloquence, but rather, perhaps, with a stammering tongue. If it was so, how must he, with such a theme, have deplored this shortcoming! It was a time to desire the choicest gifts of men and of angels. Having Jesus to commend,—Jesus whose intimacy he had enjoyed, and who had uttered to him such words of wisdom and of love,—how worthily would gifts of such a character have been employed. Andrew had them not to employ; God had not endowed him, perchance, with such means of service. Unto him it was not given with enticing words to prevail with Peter to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messias of promise; and of Peter, therefore, it could not be asserted, that though he had not seen, yet by his brother's word he had be-

lieved. But the power denied the disciple in this form was given in another. He could tell Peter where the Messias was to be seen. Poor advocate though he was in language, an effectual friend of the bridegroom he could be in action. He could not only tell Peter where the Messias might be seen, but he could conduct him to him. This was the course which he pursued: this was the course on which he depended for success. Well did Andrew anticipate, that as surely as Peter listened to the words which he had himself heard and believed, as surely as he was brought under the influence whose power he had himself experienced, it would be with his brother beloved as it now was with him: so "he brought him to Jesus."

Perhaps Peter, an elder and more experienced man, cautious, and cognizant of the existence of many pretenders, as well as of the hollowness of their pretensions, was not so taken with Andrew's sanguine representations as Andrew may have expected. There might be coldness of manner on the part of Peter as he listened to his brother's testimony. No such response, perhaps, was uttered, not only as Andrew had looked for, but as the disciple believed was suited to the interesting message which he had conveyed. Under some painful feeling of this kind, coupled with a consciousness of his own incapacity to commend Christ as he ought to do, he urged him to come, that he might see and judge for himself. Such was his own sense of the power, of the might, and of the majesty of Christ's words, that he felt assured if Peter only heard him all would be as he desired; he

felt assured that his brother could not but be persuaded, could not but be gained to the obedience of Christ. He pleaded with him, therefore, to go. The more to induce him, he went with him,—a most willing companion, sure of a welcome for himself and for all whom he might bring with him.

Whatever may be the defects in the preacher to whom you listen,—however weak may be, in his own apprehension and perhaps in yours, the man who statedly speaks to you as an ambassador from God,—if you are moved by him to go to Christ himself, he has fulfilled his ministry, and all, in that case, will be well. On the other hand, of whatever preaching you are permitted to be a hearer, though the most efficient and powerful according to human judgment, if you are not thereby conducted to Jesus himself,—if that be not its practical issue, any other will stand you in little stead, and the great purpose of your time of visitation will fail and be lost. Go, then, to himself: go to the spring rather than to the stream: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." The water of life, even, may receive some taint from the channel in which it flows; though the effect may not be deadly, it may be injurious, disturbing, or weakening. Though not producing spiritual death, it may occasion spiritual decline, or deformity, or decay. Unbecoming prejudices and unamiable manifestations of character may flow from such a cause. Go, then, to Christ himself; drink at the fountain-head. Use your earthly help chiefly to conduct you thither. That help is a pastor after Christ's own heart only as he is qualified for that

office. Be assured the Chief Shepherd is willing, and waits to receive you when you come.

If we preach Christ at all, our business in preaching is to persuade you, by every legitimate influence, to go to him. How mighty is the distinction between a desire to have you to hear us, and an honest intention to induce you truly to hear Christ. In seeking the former, we may, perchance, be actually guilty of keeping you away from him. Sin of this nature, it is to be feared, will one day be laid to the charge of some men. Self-esteem, self-interest, a secular, party spirit, have not unfrequently operated to produce such a result. The pretended pastor may positively starve the flock, by exerting his influence to detain them on the scorched, arid, and tasteless pasture of his providing, though he knows that they could elsewhere have the true nourishment which their precious souls require. Oh for the spirit of Andrew! Oh that our single aim might be to conduct you, or to have you conducted, to Christ himself! Never *man* spake,—however great the man,—as he speaks. If you hear him,—if you seek unto him to hear him,—you will be saved. All who are made his disciples indeed,—all who are called effectually, go to himself. Theirs is not a second-hand religion; they do not rest upon any man's word as their ultimate authority. The poor woman who at Jacob's well became a disciple indeed, sought immediately to communicate to others, as Andrew did to his brother, the blessed discovery which she had made: her towns-people and kinsfolk heard from her in substance what Peter heard from Andrew: words failed her, as they failed him, when she attempted to

speak the praise of the Saviour who had been revealed to her: each could have said, under conviction of the glory of the subject and of the inadequacy of their powers of speech to deal with it, "I am a child, I cannot speak:" but the power which Andrew possessed belonged to her too; she could conduct to the place where Jesus was to be found; she could say to those whom she sought to persuade, "*Come* see a man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" When her hearers obeyed, and followed her, and when they beheld for themselves the object of faith, they could declare that they had believed, not for her saying, but because they had "heard him themselves, and now knew that he was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." True servants of the Lord accompany those who obey the Word to the place where their Master dwells. They go with them in all the ordinances. They go with them, as searching together the record of divine truth; they go with them, as together calling on the name of the Lord, in all prayer,—secret, social, and public. As Moses spake to his kindred after the flesh, and Andrew to his; so true servants ever say,—it is the spirit of all their utterances, —"Come with us, and we will do you good, for God hath spoken good concerning Israel."

II. THE RECEPTION WHICH CHRIST GAVE PETER: "When Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

1. They *found* Christ. It is always so. His door is

never shut to them that seek him. He is ever found of them. It never can be said, even in a single instance, that the reason why any one is not a Christian is, that though he sought Christ, he did not find him. A gracious reception on the part of the Saviour ever awaits all who come to him in truth.

2. He was gracious in his *manner* to Peter when he was thus brought to him. Jesus "beheld him,"—he looked on him. The eyes are the interpreters of the mind. They have a language peculiarly their own. More than one intimation in Scripture warrants us in concluding, that an expression of majesty, faithfulness, and affection beamed in the eyes of our blessed Lord. Peter, in a subsequent part of his history, was made to feel the power of that expression, when he was in the very act of denying him whom notwithstanding he most sincerely loved. In that hour of too successful temptation, when the servant so faithful proved faithless, Jesus turned and "looked on him." Perhaps it was such a look, a look never forgotten, which met Peter's eyes, when, for the first time, he saw his Lord.

3. He was gracious in his *words*, words which declared at once his divine omniscience and his supreme authority.

"Thou art Simon the son of Jona." Here was a word of kindness to assure his mind, and to set him at his ease, —a word which taught Peter that he was not unknown to him who addressed him, and which taught him that neither was his father unknown. Though Peter had not hitherto seen Jesus, Jesus had, as in the case of Nathanael, seen and known him; and thus, from the beginning, the

blessed Saviour revealed to him his proper glory as the good Shepherd, who calleth his own sheep by name, who putteth them forth, and goeth before them, that they may hear and obey his voice. Jesus spake to prepare Peter for the change of his name. As in old testament times he spoke to Abram, addressing him by his original name, but giving him his new name, after he was called, and after the covenant was given to him, saying, "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham;" and as to Jacob he said, "What is thy name?" the answer about to be received being intended to mark the distinction in the new name to be given him, and then added, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel;" so was it in Peter's case. The same authority declared to him that he was now to receive a new name,—a name descriptive of his character, a name pronounced by Him who searcheth all hearts, and who knows every man, a name, moreover, of which he who gave it could make him worthy,—that authority declared, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." He had been called Simon the son of Jona. Under that appellation, and notwithstanding the obscurity of his condition, Christ had known him. Now he had received another name, and with the name he should obtain grace corresponding thereunto. Jesus spake, therefore, that Peter might be taught the necessity of a new nature,—taught that to them whom the Saviour receives he gives that nature,—taught that he was become a child in his family, and should be endowed with the adoption and the

Spirit of the adoption which all the children, all who are saved, receive. Whatever were his previous relations, whatever his past prospects, his new name declared to him his new relation, and bespoke his new hopes and future joys.

"Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." If the first words spoken declared Christ's divine omniscience, the words thus added made known his supreme authority. In the exercise of royal authority, on the installation of Joseph into the high office to which he was raised in the kingdom of Egypt, Pharaoh gave him a new name,—a name of his own choice. Nebuchadnezzar, as expressive of a similar authority, did the same to Daniel and to his three companions. To teach Adam his lordship over the beasts of the field, and over every living creature that God had created on the earth, in the most emphatic form in which it could be done, they were made to pass in review before him, that he might give them their names. Jesus, now addressing him whom Andrew had brought to him by his original name, that he might forthwith bestow his new designation, made known the relation in which he stood to him, and, with an authority divine and supreme, declared him at once a member of his family and a minister of his church.

Moreover, addressing him as he did, he declared the future excellence of Simon,—that for which, in his ministry, he was to be distinguished. It was not simply that Peter had become a child of grace, in the ordinary sense, but that, through special divine favour, he had been called to be an apostle,—an apostle whose characteristic virtue was set forth by the name which had been conferred on him. Neither was it only as God had given

names to Abraham, to Sarah, to Jacob, to Joshua, and others, in token that they were called and adopted by him, that Jesus now, in token of the same, gave Peter his name; but as saints of old gave names to their children expressive of their hopes in them, whilst they exercised faith in Him to whom they looked to realise these hopes,—hopes, however, which in their case were sometimes disappointed,—so Jesus foretold the future of Simon in his new appellation.

"Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A STONE." He was a partaker now of Christ's own nature,—himself the "Rock of Ages," the "Chief Corner Stone" of the temple. He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; he is not ashamed to call them brethren, and his own great title he does not hesitate to share with the oldest and chief of the apostles. Peter was to be one of the twelve foundations in which should be found the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Perhaps to Peter, as unto the representative of all the other apostles, this name was announced,—the unity, the inseparable connection between him who called and them who were called being so declared. It was meet that the symbol descriptive of each of the twelve should be applied to the first specially addressed with the future apostolic office in view. The character, as I have said, to be exhibited by Peter (perhaps by him specially) and by the twelve, was thus authoritatively pronounced and prophetically foretold: "Thou shalt be called Cephas." Firmness, faithfulness, constancy, were to constitute the reigning virtues of the servants of Jesus in the Gospel. Distinguished for these they must be, if the purpose of him

who called them was to be accomplished in their history; possessed of them they must be known to be, and must be acknowledged to be, by the Church; the sufficiency of grace which should be communicated to them, through their relation to the Divine Head, being thus made manifest to heaven and earth to the praise of his grace.

If Peter's weakness, under evil influences, in subsequent passages of his life, tends to raise any question in our minds as to the appropriateness of the name now for ever become his, as being descriptive of that which grace had made him, let us learn the important lesson, that Christ does not judge the character of his people by the rule which seasons of occasional infirmity might seem to indicate, but by the rule of the usual and habitual tenor of their life. And let us not be cast down, therefore, though we have cause to mourn that we are ready to halt. What Christ makes us, Christ will keep us. He accepted Andrew's offering. He made his brother, with all his natural weakness of character, his servant, his apostle, the first called of the apostles, and gave him at the same time a name which foretold what he would do for him, and what honour he had appointed him.

Christ has some honourable office for every son whom he receives. "Israel is my son—let my son go *that he may serve me*," was his injunction laid on the tyrant of Egypt by his message by Moses and Aaron. It would be monstrous to suppose that he had wrought all his signs and wonders in the land of Ham,—that he had humbled the pride of Pharaoh, and subdued the hearts of Pharaoh's subjects,—that he had brought out Israel with his strong hand,—opened the Red Sea, and conducted them safely

through, providing in all things for their exodus as he did, —all this, that after a little they should return to Egypt again, and bow their necks to the yoke which had so recently galled them. Monstrous it would be to suppose that, though the objects of so glorious an interference on the part of the great Jehovah, the people were yet to be counted, or were yet to count themselves, the bondsmen of the king of Egypt, under obligation to return to him, or under necessity to seek their enjoyment in submission to him. Assuredly all who are called of Christ, and who are saved from him who hath the power of death,—who are saved by the Redeemer of Israel,—are saved that they may serve him. If sin be pardoned, if condemnation cease, if peace be established, if the person be accepted, if the adoption of children be given, if the conscience be purged from dead works, if the Spirit dwell in the soul, and all the blessed change implied in salvation be wrought, then the end contemplated is the "service of the living God." "His servants shall serve him." Their happiness in time and in eternity is inseparably connected with the accomplishment of this purpose in them. So true is this,—a truth so universal in its application is it,—that, without question, he who serves not has not been saved! Be his pretensions what they may,—his boastings of liberty what they may,—Satan, the spiritual Pharaoh, is still his prince, and there can await him only the wages which that master gives his servants. Every sinner called is not made an apostle, but every sinner called is made a servant. There are many offices in God's house; and it is better and more honourable to be a door-keeper there than to dwell in tents of sin.

THE CALL OF PHILIP AND OF NATHANAEL.

"The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."—John i. 43–45.

We have seen in the past narrative the call of three disciples,—the first two, Andrew and his friend John, both of whom followed Christ on hearing the testimony of the Baptist, when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God;" the third, Simon Peter, whom Andrew sought, found, and brought to Jesus, after he had himself embraced him as the Messias. In the verses now before us, the Evangelist gives an account of the call of two more. These are Philip and Nathanael,—the one called directly by Christ's own voice, and the other by the agency of the party thus himself called, viz., by Philip. From such small beginnings had the kingdom of God, which the Saviour introduced, its origin, and in such proportion as we have seen did it at first increase. Let us behold in this an illustration of the form in which the origin and progress of the kingdom of grace in the soul of each of the redeemed usually appear.

We speak now, I. *Of the call of Philip;* and, II. *Of the call of Nathanael.*

I. THE CALL OF PHILIP: "The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter."—Ver. 43, 44.

Nazareth was situated in the region of Galilee. It was the place where Jesus had been brought up, and where his natural relations dwelt. On the day following that on which Peter had become a disciple,—not more than two or three days after the return of Jesus from the forty days' temptation in the wilderness,—he went forth from the valley of Jordan unto Galilee, and, we may conclude, unto Nazareth. Peculiar ties bound him to many in that city, and desiring fruit among them, he sought to carry thither, in the first instance, the blessings which he could confer on them, of which he was now the possessor, by the gifts of divine communication; he sought to make them partakers of his "sure mercies." In this incident in Christ's history, thus noted, we are taught that whilst other men have claims on our progress and efforts, they who are of our "own household" stand first. To "show piety at home," to do good there, is a natural duty, and, also, a right beginning for all subsequent general well-doing.

Of Philip we read that he was "of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter." Like Nazareth, Bethsaida lay beyond the limits of Judea Proper, and on the very outskirts of the country. It was a city not held in esteem

by the Jews,—both the cities being considered the abodes of aliens, strangers, and outcasts. We may believe, therefore, that the evangelist makes such particular mention of those places to which Christ thus first went, and from which he called his disciples, to teach at once the sovereignty of divine grace, and the efficacy of the power which he exerted. Whereas all men might have expected that the Messiah on his appearing would have chosen Jerusalem, there, in the first instance, to enter upon the exercise of his ministry, the holy city is avoided, and the despised of those who dwelt in Jerusalem are honoured by the presence of the "WORD made flesh,"—the WORD whose was "the glory of the only begotten of the Father,"—that among them his mighty works should first be wrought. Such an arrangement was entirely consistent with what we uniformly see in the kingdom of grace. There how often are the first made last and the last first! God thereby proving, to those whom he calls and sanctifies, that he does it not for their righteousness, but only for his own name's sake. "His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor our ways his ways."

The narrative of Philip's call is given in two words. Christ "findeth him:" Christ "saith unto him, Follow me."

1. "*He findeth him.*" It was not by chance (to use the language of men) that he came to Philip: none who are called to be disciples are so found. It may have seemed to Philip himself that the circumstance of Jesus meeting with him was fortuitous. He had not expected it; he had made no arrangement with a view to such

an occurrence. It was not in his mind either to put himself in Christ's way or to avoid him; and when they did meet, to his apprehension it was no more than one of the ordinary events of his every-day life. Thus is it always in the case of those who are brought to Jesus. When they are brought within his gracious influence, it is never as the result of previous arrangements on their part for such an end. Of all who are thus favoured, it may truly be said, that Christ is "found of them who sought him not." Philip's call was not an event which might or which might not have occurred,—an event simply dependent on contingencies which were under no superintending control. "Jesus *findeth* Philip." As a shepherd seeking his own lost sheep, Jesus found him; as the woman, who sought her own lost piece of silver, he found him. Philip belonged to Jesus. He had been given unto him of the Father, and was accepted by him. Philip, therefore, was in the covenant, not more as being the gift of the Father, than as being one of those who had been engaged for by Christ. He was known to the Shepherd who had come to seek and to save the lost; the Shepherd's mark, known to him, was on him,—therefore he findeth him. Under the same law Jesus finds every one whom he effectually calls. Whether the voice calling be directly his own or indirectly by the lips of any of his ministers, HE findeth them! They are his; they have been given to him; they are known by him; their names are written on the palms of his hands. A necessity exists that they should be sought out,—every one of them, to the very least,—for none of them can be lost;

every part of the arrangement being according to the will of the Father, in fulfilment of that glorious purpose "which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world was." His good pleasure it is, that of all whom he hath given to Christ he should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. Blessed truth! The Good Shepherd will search out his own. Wherever they are, he will surely find them. They are often hidden in some Bethsaida; they are often of Galilee of the Gentiles; yet he "goeth forth" to call them from their apparently hopeless darkness, whatever may be its character, and he brings them out of it into his own marvellous light.

2. "*He saith unto him, Follow me.*" Here we have, for the first time, the employment by the Saviour of words which afterwards became his formula of invitation in calling disciples, of whatever class they might be; as in Philip we have the first of the disciples who was in this manner called by Jesus himself. Other examples of the same kind, on subsequent occasions, will suggest themselves to us. What they who were addressed understood by the invitation so expressed, and what the Lord intended they should understand, cannot be difficult to determine. Follow me; quit your ordinary occupations, leave your homes, your families; consider yourselves, on hearing my voice, under obligation, from which nothing can relieve you, to obey,—follow me; follow me now, and follow me for ever. A special meaning may indeed have attached to the invitation as it was applied to those who were to constitute the future apostles, but whatever distinction might be in their case, as compared

with that of others, the form of invitation was one which clearly taught the nature of that submission to Christ which constitutes the duty of all, in all times, to whom he speaks by his word,—a duty which in every instance his elect people cheerfully discharge. To them, through grace imparted, the duty is not grievous. It was not grievous to Philip, nor to Levi, nor to any of those of whom it is said, that at Christ's will they "arose, left all, and followed him." To every gospel hearer, without exception, the word addressed by him is, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." "When the good shepherd putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and his sheep follow him, and know his voice." "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."

The general illustration presented to us in these passages being, first, that of the shepherd going before the sheep, with the sheep following; and, again, that of light shining,—leading the way, they who see walking by it, and employing it as their only guide,—such obedience as this may be supposed to describe is that which Christ expects of his own, and not that which is only pretended, nominal, and outward; not obedience, for example, like that which was offered by him who said, not having counted the cost, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,"—not such obedience as his would have been, even had he rendered it. The

sheep know the voice which they follow. The tones which the shepherd utters to regulate their progress they apprehend. He has taught his sheep, and they are familiarised to every variation of sound by which he intimates his will. The light shines in darkness that it may be seen, and that when seen it may be followed. Light is for the eye, and the eye for the light, in order that when it is employed, safety and peace, deliverance and security, may be the result. Christ will have his people to be his followers, their hearts being given to him; he will have them to be his followers, as being possessed of the life which implies spiritual vision—that vision which he gives to them who see not. The obedience of faith is first internal, and thereafter it becomes external and palpable.

The followers of Christ, obeying his word of call, look to him as the Israelites did to their pillar of cloud. He alone can show the way through this wilderness, and conduct them safely to the Canaan of heavenly rest. Only as they keep the eye of faith fixed on him, in like manner as the Israelites kept the natural eye fixed on the sign which God provided for them, can they be conducted aright in their heavenly progress, or can they ultimately attain to the appointed glorious consummation. He is the Captain of their salvation, and as such they follow him. He is the "forerunner who has for them entered within the veil," and as such they follow him. He is "the author and finisher of their faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the shame," and as such they follow him. He guides them with his eye, he instructs them, and he

teaches them the way in which they shall go. Then they are preserved, but then only—when they follow him fully, as then they are made triumphant in every conflict and sorrow, made more than conquerors, because he loveth them.

His followers, obeying his word of call, separate themselves from sin, from the world, from self, from all creature worship, from the spiritual Egypt, and all that belongs to it; for no man can go after him unless he "come out and be separate," unless he make sacrifices to the mortification of the flesh with its affections and lusts. Whereas by nature we "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever," a great change must come with the obedience of faith. To follow Jesus, therefore, is first to deny self, and then for his sake to turn the back upon every thing which might interfere with faithful adherence to him. Such following of him his true people practise, because they hear his voice; because they ever hear when he speaks, and love to hear; because they will hear no other voice; because they refuse submission to any authority but his.

His followers, as obeying his word, abandon all offices and connections inconsistent with the great office of following him fully,—all offices and connections that might interfere with the real obligations of their new relation. In the story of Ruth, we have a notable example of faithfulness in following the Lord. She denied self when she quitted her country, when she made an end of old relationships, when she separated from persons and practices which once had possession of the

affections of her heart with a hold as strong, at least, as that which secured Orpah to them all. It was not from love of change that Ruth acted as she did; it was not because change merely as change afforded pleasure or held out the prospect of advantage. Every natural feeling was wounded, her heart was pained, in rending asunder ties precious and long cherished; but the case demanded the course which she had adopted—a necessity lay on her which forbade any other. To become a partaker of the good promised to Israel, she must needs abide by Naomi,—that good she could not, she dared not forego; and if to cleave to Naomi required that she must forget her father's house and her own people, the sacrifice behoved to be made. Her hand having been put to the plough, she could not look back. The alternative of abandoning her guide to Canaan, and of abandoning Canaan itself to return to Moab and to the gods of her people, was that which she could not venture to contemplate. Life and death had been set before her: under the power of divine grace, she had made her choice; and by the power of the same grace, she "held the beginning of her confidence stedfast unto the end."

The followers of Jesus must abide with him. Where he goes, they go: where he abides, they abide: in the place where he lodges, they lodge: nothing must separate them, not even death—death must be powerless to separate Christ's people from himself and from his love. To abandon him, or to be liable to be abandoned, were to lose hope for eternity. As servants whose service is arduous, the service of the soldier or the sentinel, servants who do their master's will, who are under pledge to do

it, their affections binding them at the same time by the strongest tie,—as such servants must keep close to him who commands them, that they may hear his words, that they may hear them amidst the confused sounds which are on every hand, that they may then hear the slightest whisper, so is it with those who follow Christ; they must abide with him, and abide close unto him. If he, at any time, be far off, trouble is near. There can be no separations, for the circumstances which have produced the relation in which they stand to each other solemnly demand this. Ruth felt a truth so essential, and her life illustrates the course necessary to every one who feels the same. Thus, to cleave to him whom we follow, likewise perpetuates separation from carnal and worldly confidences, earthly hopes and joys, the great duty of our existence. Every sinner called has to contemplate this effect of true obedience, and to decide his course. Philip and his fellow-disciple were obedient here as true servants. Through grace they chose the alternative proposed to their acceptance,—and when Jesus said, "Follow me," they were enabled to "forsake all and follow him."

Is it necessary to add, that we cannot be the people of Christ if we are not of like mind, if we are not of a similar spirit with these disciples; if we do not in affection and in practice renounce "all" which stands in the way of our embracing our Lord and abiding with him,—all which might forbid or prevent faithfulness to him? Whatever thing might so engage us as to interfere with our listening to even his least word, or with our doing any part, even the most minute, of his will, must be abjured for ever. And the case being so, how precious is the promise of the grace

which can work this self-same thing in us. May we ever look to it; may we ever invoke it. When we hear his voice uttering that word, "Follow me," may we answer, "Draw us, we will run after thee,"—"turn thou us, and we shall be turned, for thou art the Lord our God."

II. The call of Nathanael: "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."—(Ver. 45.)

Of Nathanael himself, little can be said. Under that name he is spoken of only in one other place (in chap. xxi. 2), being there described as of Cana in Galilee. It would seem that he was an apostle, from the connection in which his name does occur; and as the name is not found in any of the lists of the apostles, whilst that of Philip is associated with the name of Bartholomew, it has been conjectured, with probability, that Nathanael and Bartholomew was one and the same person.

"Philip findeth Nathanael." Being himself "found," and made a "disciple indeed," he is forthwith endowed with the mind and spirit of his Lord, and, not conferring with flesh and blood, he at once enters on his work. On the same day that he was made a disciple, he seeks and finds his friend. We do not, in this case, see Christ directly calling with his own lips another disciple, but we see him doing it by the instrumentality of one whom he employs and honours as his representative. The sequel proves that Philip acted under divine direction as the Saviour's minister, and that his lips were employed

to utter the word of the Master,—the Master's divine grace making it effectual. When Christ's word is really spoken, though it be uttered by the mouth of another, his authority accompanies it. Therefore it happens that when the word is refused he is himself refused; or, that when the word is received he is accepted: a truth of high value to them who speak in his name, and which it is the duty of all to realise. He is ever present with his ministers, he is with them even to the end of the world,—present in authority, and also with the grace of the Holy Ghost, with power to forgive, with power to heal all manner of disease, and with power to bestow the gift of eternal life; therefore, wherever and whenever a disciple is to be called, the word is made effectual, and cannot fail. It is written accordingly, "Philip findeth Nathanael."

In the conversation of Philip with Nathanael, in which he testifies of Jesus, we behold at one and the same time his true faith, and his remaining ignorance.

His *faith* appears when he says, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write." He thus declared his believing conviction that in Jesus they truly had discovered the "Great Prophet," of whom Moses had written; not a messenger preceding the Messiah, but the Messiah himself, to whom the whole law referred—the grand subject of all the prophecies! The assurance that to receive Jesus, of whom he spake, as the Christ, was the great present duty, had therefore perfect possession of Philip's soul.

It is a consideration full of comfort as well as of power that all Scripture treats of Christ, that his image and

superscription is to be found on every leaf. It is the glory of the Book of books to have him as its great theme, the entire record being the completed testimony of his excellence. "If ye believed Moses ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me." "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them (to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus) in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." In the record to which the Saviour thus referred, such a delineation of him who was to come was afforded, that no man could have excuse who failed to recognise him when he actually appeared. That record was a true portrait,—a portrait, also, strongly marked and carefully filled in. A diligent comparison of the original with the picture would in every case have put an end to doubt, were the examiner right in heart and sound in mind. The prophecies,—prophetic history, prophetic types, and direct predictions,—described his person and his work. They foretold the circumstances of his birth, of his life, and of his death. Where *he* is not personally and directly the subject of the text, his church is; its preservation through his providential government, or its progress through the ordinances by which he called, and justified, and saved his people. And if his church be not the subject, his enemies are, in whom is made manifest his "judgment of this world," in execution of his glorious office as Mediator between God and man. If neither of these be directly the subject, matters preceding and preparatory to his coming are, whether great historical events occurring in the world, or changes in the arrangements of his kingdom, the importance of all evidently having con-

sisted in their bearing on the future, and on his coming into the world, and dwelling in very deed with man upon the earth. The precepts written were all the laws of his kingdom. The very genealogies, so fully extended, derived their interest from the fact, that they were recorded for the one end of making clear to the church in heaven, and the church on earth, that whilst he is indeed God, the Son of God, he is as truly Man, the Son of man, his glory being veiled by humanity, but not extinguished, nor neutralised, nor laid aside. In short, the seals of the Book were opened by him, and by him only could they have been opened. He was the true fulfilment of the word of God's testimony.

Such was the substance of the truth which Philip spoke to Nathanael. Nowhere else could the Messiah of Moses, the Messiah of the law and of the prophets, be found but in him of whom he spake to his friend. Philip therefore besought and exhorted his friend's submission,—his acceptance of Jesus as the CHRIST. He appealed to Nathanael, as to one who believed the Scriptures, as to one who was then earnestly waiting for him whom the Scriptures described, whose coming they foretold, as to one, therefore, who might be supposed to be ready to welcome the tidings, and to respond heartily to the joyful sound then uttered in his ears.

The *partial ignorance* of Philip appears in his calling Jesus "the son of Joseph." No doubt Philip's words expressed the prevailing belief,—the belief of those who had not the testimony of faith concerning the person of Christ; but the faith of Philip ought to have prevented

the use of the expression, as it would have done, we may believe, but for the remaining darkness of his mind. Christ's human nature was taken, by special miraculous intervention, from the Virgin Mary, who, when she had become the mother of the Lord, was still a virgin; but this mystery, it would seem, was not yet known to Philip.

His ignorance also appeared in his opinion that Jesus was of Nazareth, as the place of his birth. In Nazareth he had been brought up, indeed, from which circumstance he was called a Nazarene, but he was not born there. Bethlehem, as predicted in the Scripture, was the place of his birth,—a truth which it was of importance for Philip to know on the present occasion, as it is of importance for all who would teach others to be acquainted with the minutest particulars of Scripture testimony, that their trumpet may at no time give an uncertain or defective sound. Philip's ignorance of the truth referring to the place of the Saviour's nativity, put him in a position of disadvantage, as we shall see, in replying to Nathanael's objection to his testimony. Ignorance of the fact on this point was the occasion of much prejudice against Jesus among the Jews in his time, as it continues to be till this day,—a circumstance which affords a sad example of the things of which the enemy has ever taken advantage in the church, to injure the gospel; and which no less shows the duty on the part of all who speak for him, to be prepared for all cavils which have their root in untruth and intentional perversion. The Lord is still called the Nazarene; the implication being that he was not of Bethlehem—that in him the Scripture has not received its

accomplishment—therefore, that we have still to look for another.

Let us observe the faithfulness of the Scripture in not hiding the errors of the saints, neither their ignorance nor their falls into sin. Philip was a true child of God,—a disciple indeed,—when he undertook the voluntary mission to his friend Nathanael, yet he was but a babe in knowledge. He had been called—he was converted—and he gloried in Christ. He employed the talent which was committed to him, not hiding it in the earth, and he was honoured in his honest attempt to serve him who had called him, yet his ignorance is made plainly to appear. The Lord ever honours the upright, even when they are still defective in attainment, or encompassed with infirmities,—he so deals with them whilst he does not conceal their defects nor their infirmities. He does not break the bruised reed: its sound in its bruised condition may have little volume and less melody, but he does not break, he does not destroy his instrument. He can strengthen and restore the feeble, and, in his own time, he does so. He pities their weakness, but he will never excuse their wickedness or their wilfulness. He does not chastise for what they cannot do, but only for what they will not do. Truly we serve a good Master—Philip's experience proves it—but let us beware of making that consideration an excuse for indolence, or a ground of comfort under self-induced incapacity for the work of the ministry. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given unto him.

NATHANAEL'S CONFIRMATION.

"And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.—John i. 46–51.

The fire being kindled, spreads. It extends itself from object to object; an essential characteristic of this element being self-communication. The wind bloweth where it listeth; and by it the extending fire is directed.

Two of John's disciples,—all that then waited on his ministry, the remains of the crowds of a past popularity,—have had Jesus pointed out to them as the "Lamb of God." They follow him, and are made spiritually alive through faith in his name. One of the two was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He finds that brother, and brings him to Jesus.

Peter becomes a disciple, like Andrew, and the kindled heavenly flame proceeds in that line. Next day sees Philip called by the word spoken by Jesus himself. Immediately Philip seeks Nathanael to make him the recipient of the divine influence as he had himself obtained it, and now the fire runs in this new line.

Having heard Philip's testimony of Jesus addressed to Nathanael with the intention of drawing him to the Lord, we have now to speak of the additional details in the narrative of this example of grace communicated:—I. *Of Nathanael's prejudice expressed, and Philip's reply;* II. *The testimony of Jesus to his character;* III. *Nathanael's inquiry into the source of Christ's knowledge of him, and the answer;* IV. *Nathanael's conviction, and his confession of Jesus;* and, V. *Christ's expressed satisfaction, and his promise of future blessed confirmation to be given to the faith of his disciples.*

I. NATHANAEL'S PREJUDICE EXPRESSED, AND PHILIP'S REPLY: "And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see."—Ver. 46.

The form of this objection indicates that Nathanael, like many others of his time, was looking for the good connected with the advent of the Messiah, although he did not believe that it was to come from Nazareth. His difficulty on that point may have arisen from having the prophecy referring to Bethlehem in his mind. Being himself a Galilean, it is not likely that he shared in the

common prejudice against Galilee, or that he would say, that out of Galilee no prophet should arise. Nazareth, he might think, was but a trifling city; nothing was promised to it; and Philip's earnestness, however great and well intended, afforded no proof to his mind that from thence the Messiah might be expected.

Men are naturally ready to stumble at something in Christ,—something in the testimony which declares him: so to stumble is one form in which corruption works. Nazareth was a place of no repute, or perhaps of bad repute, and this was transferred to Christ himself! How unreasonable to impute to him the character of the place of his abode! This was not more unreasonable, however, than many things because of which men refuse to receive the glorious gospel of the grace of God. The woman of Samaria's objection was, that he who spake to her as the Messiah was a Jew; the objection of others was, that he was a carpenter, and the son of a carpenter; the objection of his crucifiers was, that he could not descend from the cross and save himself; Nathanael's objection was, that he was of Nazareth.

Philip's reply was such as became a disciple. He had been but a short time, indeed, in the school of Christ, but he had learned one great lesson—the lesson that communion with Christ himself would remove every doubt. Perhaps, too, he felt the difficulty of Nathanael's objection, and was conscious of his inability to reply,—perhaps he was afraid that, in speaking, he might speak unadvisedly; but he felt assured that Christ himself would so speak as to banish all hesitation from the mind

of his friend. Let Nathanael but know Jesus as he himself knew him, and he would no longer object on the ground on which he now did. He sought that his friend might believe; but desired that his faith should stand, not on human testimony only, but on that of Christ, and, through that, in the power of God; he desired that he should prove all things, and then hold fast that which was good. The reply to his objection accordingly was, "Come and see."

Ah! could we persuade men to come to Christ himself; could we persuade them to hear his own words,—to address themselves to his throne,—to submit themselves to the power of his influence,—then the end of our preaching would be secured. Then sinners would not long remain unconvinced. The first, the primary duty, is to come to himself,—to come at the call of those who speak for him, and who speak in his name. There ought to be no procrastination,—and no attempt at previous preparation, for none can be made,—no attempt of that kind, as if we imagined we could qualify ourselves for obedience, or that God required it. Our duty is, to "come"—to come now—"to come and see."

II. The testimony of Jesus to Nathanael's character: "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"—Ver. 47.

Nathanael's prejudice did not prevent his listening to Philip's counsel, and therefore coming to Jesus. It had appeared to him that he had good reason for caution,—

that now was an occasion when he who believed should not make haste,—but his soul was burning with the love of the truth, and the desire to know it. Most willing he was to be taught; and, being so, he followed Philip, as that friend led the way to him of whom he had spoken. Men of a similar character, whatever may be their present prejudices or their present ignorance, will be guided as Nathanael was, will be taught the great things of God, and be made to see his face. Moreover, when they do come, neither infirmities, nor even perverse obstinacy, will occasion their rejection. Seeking the Saviour, he will be found of them.

It is of importance to consider the purpose of Jesus, in his testimony to Nathanael's character, addressed to Nathanael himself, as expressed in this passage: to bear in mind that he was gradually revealing his glorious nature to those whom he called. It was necessary that they should know him as the "WORD made flesh;" that they should behold his glory, "the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father," for then only could he be to them the foundation of a right hope. Among other truths of the same kind regarding himself, they were therefore made to understand the great truth of his omniscience. Wherever his power has been revealed, he has always gained the submission of his people by the conviction that to him belongs the glory of that perfection. His word has ever been made to them a mirror of intense power, and of perfect accuracy. There they have always read their character, and their spiritual history in every line of its details. While to those, not savingly taught, that word may

have been as transparent glass, in which, when they looked into it, only the faintest reflection of their own likeness was occasionally discovered; to those who are the saved, it has been made universally a witness, whose testimony, however confounding, could not be gainsaid nor resisted. Such a mirror the word of Christ proved to the woman of Samaria, when he met her at the well of Jacob; such a mirror it proved to Saul of Tarsus; and such it proves to every one in whom God reveals his Son. They are made to know that nothing is hid from him; that "neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." A mirror of such truth and of such power the word of Jesus was now to become to Nathanael.

Nathanael approaches,—and Jesus speaks before either he or Philip has opened his lips. "An Israelite indeed!" exclaims the Saviour, as he looks on him. They are not all Israel who are of Israel, but here is "an Israelite indeed." The Messiah was to be a stone of stumbling to both the houses of Israel, but this Israelite had not stumbled at that stumbling-stone. Not only was he of the seed of Abraham, but he was of the children,—the children not of the bondwoman, but of the free. His progress, as being of "the children of promise," hitherto had been small; but grace had been implanted in him, and though only in the germ, it existed as a living principle in his soul. Made a partaker of a new nature, he was an "Israelite,"—an "Israelite indeed:" not a Jew as being one outwardly, and as being of the circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but a Jew in-

wardly, and of the circumcision which is of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God. He walked in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised, and he was an Israelite,—such an Israelite as Jacob was when he exclaimed, "I have waited for thy salvation." Ignorant, obstinate, and bigotted in principle he might be, but he was an Israelite,—not merely a worshipper in the temple, but of the sons of Levi, who being purified, offer their sacrifices in righteousness. How true is it that an outward profession alone will not satisfy Christ,—that to be born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, will not satisfy him. An "Israelite indeed" he will have in each of his people. If the trial of our faith prove us to be true men,—if the many tests which cannot fail to be applied during our earthly course, amidst its ceaseless changes, declare the faith to be genuine,—we shall thereby be known to be "Israelites indeed." Behold this sight!—"Behold an Israelite *indeed*," said the Lord; for he would have every professing disciple, in every generation of the church, to mark the distinction which he thus proclaimed,—the special distinction in Nathanael's character, on which he fixed Nathanael's attention and that of his associates.

"Behold an Israelite indeed, *in whom is no guile*," because he is an "Israelite indeed:" behold one possessed of a qualification essential to those who may be described by that name: prejudiced, but honest in his prejudice; learned in the knowledge of the letter of the truth, perhaps, or not learned, but with no desire or intention to

pass for what he is not,—with no desire or intention to appear in profession that to which, in actual practice, he could lay no claim: no Judas, no dissembler, no lover of praise to be purchased with the price of hypocrisy and fraud! Perhaps Jesus spake, not merely to the general view of the character of Nathanael, but to some special experience of his mind which was then present to his convictions, and which then impressed him,—to some secret sentiment or resolution, produced by the circumstance of Philip's address.

Christ's true people,—those who are "Israelites indeed,"—have sins, many and grievous, the burden of their lives. But they are a sincere people; a deceitful tongue is not in their mouth. In their spirit there is no guile. As in their regenerated nature they are delivered from the power of their first father, "who abode not in the truth," and are conformed to the image of the God of truth, of whom they are now "begotten again," truth is in their inward parts. Their emblem is the sheep, not the fox,—the dove, not the hawk. They are "children,"—not "aliens," practised in the ways of the world. Far, indeed, from sinless, they are, nevertheless, in the matter of salvation, upright, and in all things true. They have closed with Christ,—with his righteousness, with his promised grace,—on right principles, and for right ends. To be double-minded, therefore, to dissemble, to practise guile, must be, in every case, the sure evidence that they who do so are not of God, and the no less sure indication that Christ will not own them. In the end he will say of all who are truly his, "Behold, I and the

children whom the Lord hath given me,"—"children who did not lie,"—"Israelites indeed!"

III. NATHANAEL'S INQUIRY INTO THE SOURCE OF CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF HIM, AND THE ANSWER: "Nathanael said unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee."—(Ver. 48.)

Nathanael's inquiry afforded evidence of his sincerity. He felt within himself, and he knew, that the words of the Saviour had described him in his proper character, as truly as the woman of Samaria felt the same thing when she was made the subject of divine scrutiny, and of divine testimony by the word of the Saviour. The description was commendatory in Nathanael's case; but that it was so, did not prevent his acknowledging its faithfulness. His inquiry was the result and expression of wonder and admiration, not of vanity, nor of self-esteem, nor of affected modesty. By the grace of God he was what he was; that was a truth present to his mind; and conscious that to him with whom he had now to do his character was naked and opened, why should he conceal his convictions? He did not conceal them. In effect, his inquiry, in reply to Christ's word of reception, expressed the same admission as that which was made by the penitent at the well of Jacob when she said, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet;" and it was beautified with the ornament of a similar sincerity. His thoughts were not on himself, but on Christ. The faithfulness of the Saviour's description was admitted, but not

dwelt on with vanity or self-regard: and he was intent only on knowing him to whom he had been conducted, and who had spoken to his heart. He begins, in short, to perceive Christ's glory; the eyes of his understanding are opening; the veil is being removed from his soul; his heart glows; Philip, he begins to think, has made the great discovery,—has really found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write; and for himself, he is about to obtain the answer of his many prayers, the realization of his fondest hopes!

What a distinction is there between self-estimation and admiration of Christ! The latter was the absorbing sentiment in the heart of this man. His inquiry, as we have said, proves it. A human delineator of character would have exhibited Nathanael, under the testimony borne by Jesus to what he was, disclaiming what he would have called an undeserved compliment, and shrinking from the ascription of aught so flattering. But in such a delineation there would be no representation of genuine humility,—the humility which is ever the result of seeing Christ in his glory, and of being filled with the contemplation of his excellency; but rather an exhibition of vanity gratified, of self consciously exalted and indirectly claiming merit. Here we have an "Israelite indeed;" and no inconsistency occurs in the description to detract from the lustre of the virtue which distinguished him.

Christ's reply to the inquiry met Nathanael's state of mind. It was, in effect, a further revelation of his glory to him,—an additional discovery of himself to the

new disciple. He had been beforehand with Philip. Philip had, indeed, been the instrument of calling his friend, and on that call he had come; but, "Before Philip called thee," said Jesus, "when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee."

No minister is ever first with those who are called. If they be called, it is because Jesus sees and marks them,—yea, and works in them,—previously. By him, ministers find and invite sinners, and prevail with them! In the place to which Nathanael had retired, Jesus saw him. As he saw Adam and Eve, when they sought to hide themselves, so did he see him. Neither the trees of Eden, nor the fig-tree which sheltered Nathanael, could hide from the Lord. Nathanael had thought himself hid,—and from the eyes of man he knew that he was hid,—but Christ saw him! His occupation on that memorable occasion the Lord also knew; and no doubt the character he had drawn of him had reference to the fig-tree scene, and to the tokens of character which that scene had afforded. It had not been a time of sloth, or of slumbering, or of evil-doing. Had it so been, no such approving reference had been made to the fig-tree. An unknown preparation was going forward in Nathanael's heart, for the message which was on the way to him, as we may suppose; and the exercise of his mind made him quick to apprehend that message when it came. Had Nathanael, under the fig-tree, searched the Record of Truth, calculating whether the fulness of the time had come? Had he prayed in deep earnestness that the God of Israel might hasten it, and appear in his glory to build up Zion? Had his soul

dilated under the apprehension of the preciousness of the consolation which that appearance involved, and for which he waited? If so, then the words which Jesus addressed to him, as he drew nigh in company with Philip, were not more in correspondence with his state of mind then, than the message of that friend had been in correspondence with his state of mind when he first met him, and when he proclaimed, in such ardent terms, the discovery which he and others had made,—which they had made in the light of the day-spring from on high with which they had been visited. Ah, will his prejudice still endure? "Come and see," his friend had said. He came and saw, —he came and heard. "Is not this the Messiah?" Speak, Nathanael, and tell what great things God hath done for thee!

IV. NATHANAEL'S CONVICTION, AND HIS CONFESSION OF JESUS: "Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."—(Ver. 49.)

He that originally commanded the light to shine out of darkness had shined into the heart of this "Israelite indeed," and had given him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Flesh and blood had not taught him, but the Father. He had drawn him too; and now Nathanael's eyes behold his salvation!

Nathanael had spoken to make inquiry; Jesus had answered. He speaks again.—"*Rabbi!*" He acknowledges the Prophet who was promised, the great Instructor,—him

that was before John the Baptist, before Moses, and before all.—"*Thou art the Son of God!*" Nathanael knew from the prophets that the Messiah was to be the "Son of God." He had heard the Baptist's testimony: "I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."—(Ver. 34.) Something more than this, however, was now revealed to him, and revealed in him; for the time had come to this disciple when he could unite his testimony to theirs who could declare, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;" not as simply echoing their utterance, but as having for himself seen, and known, and felt the truth. Has a day of similar power come on us,—a day of the power of the Son of man, the Man of God's right hand? Devils have sometimes owned Christ, when they believed and trembled before him, ascribing honour to him in using and applying to him his title of glory; but devils have never praised him in their hearts, though they called him Lord: nor have we, if we have not done it under the grace of the Spirit,—if we have not done it like Nathanael, as sinners convinced of our need of a Saviour, and made to see in Jesus the perfect preparation and provision for all our wants.—"*Thou art the King of Israel!*" The essential glory of him whom he now acknowledged as the long sought Messiah was not alone present to the eyes of Nathanael. Had his vision been thus limited, he had had no more comfort in his confession than devils have in theirs. In the person of Jesus he sees David's Lord indeed, but he sees also David's Son. The divine teaching which had discovered the one had also discovered the other. The underived and the

derived glory are equally made known to him;—the Son as "over all, blessed for ever;" and the Son "in the form of a servant, in the likeness of sinful flesh:" a King,—a servant; yet a King, the "King of Israel." Nathanael, no doubt, knew that the promised Messiah was to be of the lineage of David after the flesh,—that he was to be of the fruit of his body. But he spake not now chiefly of that distinction, whatever might be his appreciation of it, or in whatever manner earthly expectations united with higher hopes in his mind. If he himself was an "Israelite indeed," he had found him who was the "King of Israel" indeed; the King of such "Israelites" as he confessed himself to be one,—their Head, their Hope, their All,—the King upon the holy hill of Zion! The sceptre in the hand of this King, Nathanael now touched, felt its power, and confessed the blessedness of submission to it. That law, of which the King was the representative, was holy in his estimation, and the commandment holy, and just, and good: the service and the suffering therewith connected; the peace which his reign implied, and the war to which it might summon,—all were good!

How satisfactory was the testimony of the new disciple: "Rabbi,"—"Son of God,"—"King of Israel!" Here was the result of light from heaven, that light which shines on all who pass beyond the precincts of the kingdom of darkness. Here was the knowledge which, by application of the Spirit, brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Do we possess it? Have we felt its influence? Can we rejoice in it?

V. CHRIST'S EXPRESSED SATISFACTION, AND HIS PROMISE OF FUTURE BLESSED CONFIRMATION TO BE GIVEN TO THE FAITH OF HIS DISCIPLES: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."—(Ver. 50, 51.)

In one thing only had Jesus given Nathanael evidence of his glory; and he believed on the ground of that evidence, though it was comparatively limited. To Jesus this faith was the subject of sincere satisfaction. But there were greater things in store for one who had been faithful in that which was least. Nathanael was yet to be a witness of all his great works that were to testify of him as the "Son of God with power;" and if the fruit of what he had already experienced had been so precious, what might not be expected from the future! The Jews, generally, saw and believed not. Though the "works" were appealed to,—though submission on the ground of the testimony afforded by them was demanded,—the wicked Jews withstood the summons, and refused to believe. Not so did Nathanael. He had been made to differ. Faith had been wrought in him. He had been apprehended of the Spirit, quickened, made alive. Having thus the eye to see, the ear to hear, the hand to appropriate, the appetite to relish; when the great object of faith was presented to him, it was accepted. His countrymen had eyes to see, but they did not see; ears to hear, but they did not hear:

their hearts they made gross, and they refused to listen,—they refused to be saved. For them, therefore, there could be no progress; but for Nathanael, though prejudice still mingled with his faith, "greater things" than all he had seen remained to be beheld. Upon earth he should see them, but especially in heaven. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."

The nature of the promised "greater things" Jesus taught with marked emphasis: "Verily, verily, I say unto you," (an expression equal to, "Thus saith the Lord," in Old Testament language,) "hereafter" (from this time forth) "ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man." For Nathanael, and for all who, like him, believed by such evidence as was given in the gospel, was reserved the glorious vision of the whole heavenly world engaged in His service in whom they had believed. The allusion is to Jacob's ladder: what Jacob saw was now to receive fulfilment. The "Son of man" was at once the dwelling of God, the gate of heaven, the way of access thither, and the medium of communication. The source of all spiritual influence was on earth in his person. In him all spiritual influences, to whomsoever they might be imparted, were to have their origin;—in that sense, from him they were to "ascend," as upon him they were to "descend," that through him they might be transmitted to his members. This Nathanael and others would see; even the series of glories which was about to be unfolded in Christ's person

and Christ's work in behalf of his church from that time forward. Thus heaven and the fallen world of men were again to be united,—thus the oneness between the higher world of spirits and this lower sphere of earthly things was to be restored; a revelation that was now made, and that was at all times to be made, to faith only. "When Christ became man, and entered on his ministerial office, and began to preach, then was heaven opened, and it remains open; and from that time, since the baptism of Christ in Jordan, it never has been shut, and never will be shut, though we do not see it with our bodily eyes. . . . . Christ says this: 'Ye are now heavenly citizens, and have your citizenship above in the heavenly Jerusalem, and are in communion with the holy angels, who shall without intermission ascend and descend about you.'"—(LUTHER.)

How rich is divine grace, and how happy they who are made partakers of it!

THE MARRIAGE AT CANA.

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."—John ii. 1–11.

Let us speak, I. *Of the place which this miracle holds among the miracles of Christ;* II. *Of the circumstances in which it was wrought;* III. *Of the miracle itself;* and IV. *Of the things in which we are instructed by it.*

I. The place which this miracle holds among the miracles of Christ.

In ver. 11, it is called the "beginning of miracles;" and what we are to understand by this deserves inquiry.

In point of time, it was the first of the miracles wrought by Jesus. Previous to entering on his public ministry he may have manifested his divine power by miracles; but if he did so, no record of it exists, and we are not entitled to assume that he did, the presumption from the narrative before us being that he did not. This miracle, however that question may be decided, was the first subsequent to his baptism, and to the descent of the Holy Spirit then.

It was the first, also, as indicative of the general character of all that were to follow,—the illustrative type of the wonderful works by which his mission was to be attested. It bespoke his omnipotence and generous goodwill to men; and, at the same time, the changed nature of the dispensation of the gospel introduced by him, compared with the dispensation which had so long existed,—the passing away of the authority, bondage, and exclusiveness of which system it also announced.

It was the beginning of the entire series of wonders which had as their object to "manifest forth his glory" to his disciples, that they might see it, and that their matured faith might stand in the full knowledge of him. "He was in the beginning"—"He was with God"—"He was God"—"All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." In the fulness of time "he was made flesh;" and, for thirty years after he had assumed humanity, his glory was comparatively concealed. Now, however, when at the end of that time he had entered on his great mission, having been publicly instituted therein, his glory must be concealed

no longer. To them who received him, he was to be revealed, as the "only-begotten of the Father," in the glory properly belonging to him in that character. Nathanael and others had already seen that glory. One comparatively limited example of the exercise of his divine nature had forced from the "Israelite indeed" the exclamation, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel:" but "greater things" were to be thereafter seen; and a short time only was permitted to intervene till the promise began to be fulfilled. On the third day after that word was spoken, the first accomplishment of the promise, the remarkable event recorded in this passage, occurred. When we take into account that the special object of the evangelist, in all this Gospel, is to testify of Christ as God in our nature, we may assure ourselves that the miracle thus related by him aims at that end in the most solemn manner. As the "beginning of his miracles," it is in that view to be carefully studied,—earnestly considered. We need not be surprised that Satan seems to have a special quarrel with this "work" of Christ; that men, under his suggestion, have spoken as if the record of it required qualification, and might not be unreservedly or literally accepted;—but on that very account it is our duty to be earnest in receiving, and faithful in seeking to apprehend, all the truth which it involves.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE MIRACLE WAS WROUGHT.

The time was the third day after the call of Nathanael, and after the events connected with his call, as related in the first chapter. The occasion was a marriage at Cana in

Galilee, in the region so called, and at no great distance from Nazareth. The mother of Jesus was at the marriage, probably as a relative or connection of the family. She was, in some way, interested in the details of the marriage arrangements, and does not seem to have been simply one of the ordinary guests. As no mention is made of Joseph, the probability is that by this time he was dead, and that Mary was a widow. Jesus himself was present by invitation, being accompanied by the *five* who had now joined him as his disciples; and who, no doubt, for his sake formed part of the guests, having been invited because they were his friends. Where Christ is valued and entertained, his servants will always be welcome.

The usual marriage festivities had not come to a close, when the wine which had been provided for the occasion began to be exhausted. Canaan being a wine country, the use of that beverage was within reach of the very poorest of the people, even on ordinary occasions, but especially at their feasts and seasons of rejoicing of all kinds. The supply which the family at Cana had laid in for the marriage proved insufficient for their purpose; and the conjecture, in explanation of this fact, which has been suggested, is by no means improbable,—that as Jesus came unexpectedly to Galilee at this time (chap. i. 43), the invitation which was sent to him, in which his disciples shared, had not previously been calculated on in the preparations for the marriage. The scarcity was caused by the unlooked-for addition to the party which he and his disciples made.

In these circumstances Mary applied to Jesus. She was

anxious for the credit of the entertainers, and tenderly earnest to prevent what might prove an untoward thing in itself, or be painful to them all; so when the wine was not quite exhausted, though, as we may conceive, nearly so, she made her remark, as here described, saying, "They have no wine." Did Mary, in addressing Jesus in these words, only do that which we may believe was her constant practice—go to her son for counsel and relief in what she felt to be an emergency? or had he privately given her any previous intimation of his purpose to do that which he was about to do,—her impatience that he should do it, leading her into the improper course detailed in the narrative? These are questions to which no answer with certainty can be given; though, if we were at liberty to answer the latter in the affirmative, some light might be cast on this passage.—In her conduct we are, at least, made to see her regard and sympathy for her relatives, under whose roof they were all assembled, and her delicate and housewife-like anxiety that they should not be disconcerted. It seems natural to think that this anxiety began long before the actual difficulty foreseen by her had been felt; and it is not improbable that the expression of her feelings to Jesus had drawn from him some assurance, such as we have supposed, that his unexpected presence would not be permitted to occasion any embarrassment.—We are made to see, likewise, her faith in him, not merely as *her* son, but as "the Son of God." She may have witnessed no miracle performed by him hitherto, but many instances of his considerate kindness and compassion she must have known; now, however, if the conjecture be a

just one, that insight, not vouchsafed to others, had been given to her on the subject of the "*greater* things" spoken of to Nathanael, we have the manifestation of her grace of faith,—faith in his essential glory,—the divine principle of a renewed life.—Moreover, we are made to see her modesty and humility. She demands nothing—she prescribes nothing—she assumes no authority. She makes intimation to Jesus of what is about to happen, or what has happened already, as she perceives, to the discomfort of those whom she would willingly help, and to the marring of the enjoyment of all who were assembled ;—this she does, and no more, submitting the matter to his will.

We cannot conceal from ourselves, however, that her application displeased Jesus; and that, in the reply which he made to her, he employed the language of reproof. The use of the term, "Woman," does not imply this,—though, strange as it is to our ears, we might suppose it did. The words, "What have I to do with thee?" however, convey, certainly, the expression of dissatisfaction. We must perceive that she addressed him as if her relationship after the flesh entitled her to consideration, when making such a remark as she now made; that she addressed him as if what was matter of such anxiety to her, ought to be the same also to him,—as if his views ought to coincide with hers, and as if he was bound to act on them. The chief thought in Mary's mind, probably, was to prevent the embarrassment of her friends and the discomfort of the guests; and in her nervous anxiety, she felt that he would surely see it to be his duty to sympathise with her. The answer of Jesus

was in reproof; teaching Mary that her relationship after the flesh was no ground on which she might make application to him, and that even the claims on that ground, such as she might once have possessed, had now passed away; teaching her that in all matters pertaining to his great work—the work on which he had now entered—she was no more to him than other believers, and that he was no more to her than he was to all, however remote in natural kindred, who embraced him by a living, spiritual faith. As he was David's Lord as well as David's son, so was he her Lord; the first and great duty of all being to worship him and to submit unto him in all things. His answer was a reproof, also, teaching her that what he was about to do, was not to be done for the reason for which she desired it; and, therefore, that there was no similarity in their views of the matter, hers being earthly and his heavenly. It was a great occasion: he was about to "manifest forth his glory" before the eyes of his disciples, for the benefit of generations unborn,—for the benefit of men of every name, until the latest ages: it was therefore necessary, that this work should be guarded from misconception of every kind, and that by such an incident as had now occurred it should be taken out of the category of common occurrences.

But whatever severity may have marked the reproof in its substance, we are entitled to conclude that the severity was mitigated by his manner. The words, too, which immediately followed the reproof, seem to indicate kindness. "Mine hour is not yet come," he said. She had acted on her own impulse, and *her* time was that which she judged

fittest and chose for herself; but *he* waited the time of the divine purpose and will. The extremity had not yet occurred,—to which, as we have supposed, she had pointed in her private intercourse with him,—when his interference might become really what he intended it should prove. The barrel of meal and the cruse of oil were done to the last dregs, ere the miracle was wrought which made the store inexhaustible: had any of the old wine at this marriage remained, the way would not have been open for the display of his power. The stock in hand must be expended in the first instance, then—and not till then—he would work. So has Christ ever acted in the experience of his people: their entire destitution of help but from him alone, and their solemn conviction of that destitution, has always proved to be his "hour" for sovereign interference, for merciful visitation, and for faithful deliverance—such an extremity, and not any previous time.

III. The Miracle itself.

Mary made no reply to the reproof. She was silent under it, though her heart was neither inattentive nor insensible. At the same time, keeping her object in view, and evidently assuming, that though her application had been met by an apparent refusal, Jesus would, in his own way, as well as at his own time, show his grace according to her desire, she in faith of this instructed the servants of the house, saying, (ver. 5,) "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

They complied when the time came: "And there were

set there six waterpots of stone,"—not wine vessels, but such vessels as were in common use among the Jews for their various washings or "purifyings." Why so many were at hand, and ready to be set in order by the servants, seems obvious. The guests at the marriage were numerous: hospitality required that, previous to the feast, they should have opportunity to wash. The vessels having been employed for that purpose, and, perhaps, in other uses likewise, they stood prepared for the further purpose to which they were now to be put: the directions given by Mary, therefore, met with immediate compliance. The vessels were of stone, and of dimensions large enough to contain each twenty gallons, or more, of our measurement.

What delay occurred after Mary had spoken we are not informed, but when his "hour" was come, Jesus, pointing to the vessels standing empty and clean, after they had served their usual purposes on the occasion, said unto the servants, (ver. 7,) "Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim." Nothing more was done. It was not the disciples who supplied the water and poured it into the vessels, nor was it the Lord himself. He did not touch the vessels with which the water was drawn, nor those into which, when drawn, it was poured; nor did he utter a word whilst the servants were obeying him. When he opened the eyes of the man born blind, he anointed them with the clay-ointment which he had previously prepared; and he spake to him, giving him instructions which he was to follow. In the miracle of the cure of the impotent man at the pool

of Bethesda, he also spake, and power accompanied his *word*. But here no more was done than to give commission to the servants of the house,—or they may have been strangers specially engaged for the service of the feast, —to fill the vessels of dead stone with common water!

Immediately after, the additional commission was given in the words (ver. 8): "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast." Instant obedience followed, "and they bare it." The "governor," according to the custom of the Jews, was the friend who, as representative of the household, had charge of all the arrangements of the marriage festival; whose office it was to see generally to the comfort of the guests, and particularly to judge of the quality of all that was placed before them for their use. In the present instance, it was the duty of the official so named, presiding in this capacity, to taste the fresh supply of wine which, from whatever quarter it came, he must have been aware had been provided on the exhaustion of the previous stock. He did so; and immediately addressed the bridegroom in the hearing of all who were present. Though the servants knew how the wine had been produced, and whence it had come, the "governor" did not. He, therefore, judged of its character by the qualities which he perceived it possessed,—his opinion being necessarily unbiassed, whilst all possibility of collusion was precluded. In his address to the bridegroom, the governor alluded to what they all knew was a common practice, although he did not intend to allege it of his host or his friends,—the practice of giving the wine

which was inferior in quality last, when the palates of men after a while were become dull, and incapable of distinguishing between the good and the bad. It is clear the governor himself was not in such a condition; nor were any of the guests. The practice alluded to, the bridegroom had not followed, for he had done the very opposite; and, to his praise, the governor announced this to the company. "Every man," said he, (ver. 10,) "at the beginning, doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

Such was Christ's "beginning of miracles:" the first example of what he had foretold to Nathanael and the other disciples: a miracle by which he "manifested forth his glory," to the great increase and confirmation of their faith. It was the mighty deed of Him "by whom all things were created, who is before all things, and by whom all things do consist." He willed that the water should become wine, and it became wine. He made no appeal to heaven; he did not openly make mention of his Father, as at other times, and on the occasion of some other miracles; he did not ask divine aid, as on all occasions was done, either secretly or openly, by the prophets; but of his own direct power he did this great work. By what we call, and justly call, a *miracle*, he wrought that which in the ordinary course of his providence he never ceases to perform.

The vine-tree is, in effect, the "*waterpot*." It is supplied with moisture drawn from the soil in which it is planted, or infused into it from the atmosphere in which

it grows, or shed upon it from the clouds which carry the treasures committed to them, to be dispensed according to the appointment of Him by whom they are commissioned. The vine receives the water; and, through the creative power by which all things consist, they who draw receive from it the rich wine. The great power of Christ operates in either way;—it operated without the intervention of the usual means, at the marriage in Cana; it operates by such intervention year after year, and causes the earth to yield her increase. Thus he leaves not himself without witness, in that he does good, and giveth rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with food and gladness. If Nathanael was convinced by the *word* which Christ spake to him, how much more must his whole mind have been now brought into captivity to the happy obedience of his Lord, by the "greater things" which his eyes were made to see!

IV. The things in which we are instructed by this miracle.

1. We see the anticipation, on the part of the Saviour, of corruptions which were to arise in the church, and the provision which he made in preparation for their appearing.

One notable corruption, chargeable against the Church of Rome, is the depreciation of God's institution of marriage. The unmarried state is, according to the teaching of the Romish system, holier than the married; the impurity implied in marriage is inconsistent with the superior holiness required in the case of so called *holy*

persons of both sexes. In opposition to this, behold, in the scene before us, the solemn sanction of the Saviour to the ordinance of marriage,—an ordinance which was instituted and blessed when sin was unknown on earth, which has been ever honoured of God, and which is positively declared to be "honourable in ALL!" The beginning of the miracles by which Jesus "manifested forth his glory" was associated with the celebration of marriage!

Another of the Romish delusions is, the distinction of meats: a man is holier for what he eats, or for what he abstains from eating and drinking. By the miracle at Cana, and the circumstances connected with it, Jesus proclaimed the great truth, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink;" that the distinctions of meats and drinks, which prevailed in the time of the Old Testament, having served their temporary purpose, were ready to vanish away,—their virtue having consisted, even when they were in force, only in their typical uses,—only in their foreshadowing the good things which were to come. John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking,—still practising the austerities of the expiring dispensation, for he was of it; but Christ himself, in whom every symbolic veil was done away, came both eating and drinking.

Worse than all, Rome teaches the worship of the mother of Jesus. The worship of Mary especially constitutes the idolatry of that church. Mary's superiority to her Son as an object of adoration,—her superiority to him as an object of confidence and hope,—is the distinguishing corruption of the great "mystery of iniquity;"—the corruption which, for obvious reasons, makes the Romish system

more vile than all previous forms of heathenism. In the narrative before us, we are, indeed, made to see Mary's excellence as a believer and a saint; but we are also made to see her imperfection as a sinner. On the first public occasion of our Saviour's giving evidence of his divine power and authority, and on the very first occasion that his mother has spoken to him before men since his entry on his public ministry, after being instituted into his high office of Mediator, she is openly rebuked by him,—and that, too, as presuming on her relationship after the flesh: thus he corrected for ever the error of the supposition that, upon such ground, she could have any influence: thus he taught her that on no other principle than the principle of the living faith of a true believer, the principle of her relation to him *after the Spirit*, could she at all expect to prevail with him in her supplications! "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." True; and blessed among women was Mary. But rather, "blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." That Mary was included among them who are thus described, was her true distinction, and her true honour.

2. The great duty of temperance and self-denial, amidst the profusion of our temporal mercies, is here strikingly illustrated.

We stand amazed at the quantity of wine which the Lord created on the occasion of this marriage feast. What lavish superabundance! we exclaim;—what lavish superabundance in an article not essential as food, but rather a minister of luxury! Taking into account the probable

circumstances of the parties on whom the gift is bestowed, how unaccountable that the Lord should confer it on them! But is not that lavish superabundance in strict accordance with all that the Lord does in his usual government? As a King, does he not ever bestow with royal munificence? In all the bounties of his providence is he not profuse, without respect of persons? Is he so, however, to encourage excess? Can any one suppose, or will any one assert, that he is, therefore, the abettor of evil, or that he therefore countenances evil? When the land of a certain rich man brought forth abundantly, was it to put temptation in his way, or to draw him into sin? No form of transgression is more clearly denounced in the Word of God than the sin of intemperance; though, indeed, of the victims of other sins (that of covetousness, for instance) we have more awful examples more frequently recorded in the Scriptures than of those of drunkenness. No sin can, in its manifestations, be more vile than this,—a sin which sinks man, not merely to the level of the beasts, but lower still,—a sin which, when its victim has sold himself irretrievably to its loathsome and degrading seductions, more than brutifies him. The sentence is emphatic and unequivocal: "The drunkard shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Did Christ, then, provide for, encourage, or in any sense countenance, that which is so abominable? He was accused of doing so; and no wonder that they who hold all the truth which he taught, and who will not let it go, under whatever clamour, are sometimes accused of doing the same. He was accused of being a favourer of intemperance, both in eating

and drinking: and perhaps it was in allusion to this, the "beginning of miracles," that his enemies said of him, "Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" But was the allegation true? There is a certain kind of argument which supports, or which seems to support, the truth of the blasphemous inference. Was it so, however,—or can any man believe that it was the conviction of the accusers of our Lord, or is it truly the conviction of modern controversialists, that in what he did, as recorded in the narrative before us and in other parts of the gospel history, he in the least degree, by a single expression, or gesture, or act of any kind, gave countenance to, or looked with favouring or tolerating eye upon what was intemperate, or what, in any reasonable view of it, conduces to intemperance? If the accusations of enemies can be sustained as proof against him, he was a Sabbath-breaker too. Most vehemently and uniformly was he charged with that crime; yet he was the Lord of the Sabbath. By his authority it had been originally instituted, and by his sanction it was still guarded. He taught, indeed, what had been forgotten by his accusers, that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. This he taught, to deliver his holy institution from the injury it suffered at the hand of blind superstition and ignorant bigotry. In like manner he taught also that "meat is for the belly, and not the belly for meat:" that men might distinguish between the abuse and the lawful enjoyment of the things which he has made, and which he richly supplies; between the sin of excess and the liberty of a temperate use of his crea-

tures; between converting them into a snare and a curse, and enjoying them as a Father's blessings.

All the gifts of God are bestowed in rich profusion. Their great abundance, amounting to apparent superfluity, has an object. The Giver thereby puts us on our trial, tests and proves us. Under this arrangement, self-restraint and self-denial are tested and exercised, as thus only they can be. Temptation may thus come; but to be tempted is not sin on our part: Christ suffered being tempted; temptation is inseparable from a residence in the dominions of the prince of this world. It is overruled for good: we are perfected, not by being exempted from temptation, but by being made to endure it; by being preserved in our integrity under it; by having grace communicated to cause us to triumph over it. This arrangement forms part of God's plan with his people. Abraham knew temptation and the trial of faith under it in some of its severest forms; so did Moses, as well as all the other worthies. In the case before us, we behold a poor but pious and temperate-living family, with a limited stock of perhaps inferior wine, supplied, to an amazing extent, with the best. When we think that the quantity provided by the miracle could not have been less than (to use modern measure and phraseology) sixty dozen of bottles, we may conceive how valuable a gift was conferred on them. Were, then, the flood-gates of sin thereby thrown open? was this provision furnished to give scope for excess? or was encouragement given to intemperance? We answer, No. He who bestowed the gift was present; not in vain did he by the gift

"manifest forth his glory" to the recipients of his bounty: as seeing his glory, and as under his eye, they proceeded to use it,—as seeing him, as knowing him, as loving his law, as accountable unto him and acknowledging this, they enjoyed the fruit of his creative power, the token of his love to them. The guarantee for temperance, the safeguard against excess and abuse, was their fear of God and their faith;—a scanty supply of wine, or the withholding of it altogether, could have been none.

The same principle is applicable in other things,—applicable as to the enjoyment of good health, as to what we eat, as to our dress, as to our furniture, as to our recreations, as to our amusements, as to our reading; true as to these,—and true as to what we drink. In all things we must act and endure as being under Christ's eye, as being mere stewards of his gifts, as being on our trial to fulfil his will, having respect to the rule of his Word, and through grace seeking to glorify his name. It is a mistake, or it is disregard of a great Scripture principle, to teach what is opposed to this: it is doctrine involving an implied censure of the divine order; and, virtually, it is a secret assumption that we are wiser and better than God.

3. The superior excellency of the gospel dispensation seems to be symbolically represented by this miracle. The "beginning of miracles" on the part of Moses, as the agent of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, was to change water into *blood:* By the law is the knowledge of sin; the wages of which is death. The "beginning of miracles," on the part of the great Deliverer from the spiritual Egypt, was to change water into *wine:* The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Again, "The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Where Christ is, "great joy" must be. He, therefore, is in the right sense, "the wine that maketh glad the heart of man," and the oil "to make his face to shine," as well as the "bread" to strengthen him.

Christ's presence, further, changes the character of all the circumstances of his people. As wine compared to water, so is the change which he makes in their experience. He makes their poorest fare and their most hapless condition as water changed into wine. This he does to their full contentment, and in contrast to the world, which gives not as he does; which gives poor fare always, and bestows its best first,—its evil things coming at the close, to shut up the scene in darkness, and to consign the soul to everlasting bitterness.

Finally, in all our history, unto the end of our earthly course, at whatever time Christ comes into our dwellings, and at whatever time he and his are welcomed as guests, he ever communicates blessing, fitly represented by his great work at the marriage of Cana in Galilee. But be his goodness, in our present circumstances and under that rule, ever so great, his bounty ever so rich, all that we receive in this world is but as *water* compared with *wine*, —even with that wine which he will drink with us "new in the kingdom of heaven." The chief glory of our portion here, is that it is an earnest of what shall be hereafter,—an earnest of the fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore which are at the right hand of God above.

"The company at this wedding may represent the church of Christ, which is often represented as the guests called together to a marriage feast. Jesus, and his mother, and his disciples, were there; thus it is in the church. The former circumstances of the marriage, wherein they wanted wine, represent the state of the church before Christ came; or rather, before the evangelical dispensation was established. The latter circumstances of the wedding, wherein they had plenty of wine, represent the latter state of the church, after the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, and especially after the fall of Antichrist. The wine represents the spiritual supplies of his church, the grace and comforts of the Holy Spirit, which are often represented by wine in Scripture. Their wine ran low, and was just out; so formerly the Old Testament church had a supply of wine; but when Christ came into the world it was just out,—they had in a manner no wine. But when Christ came and ascended up to heaven, he soon gave his church plenty of wine, and much better wine than ever the Jewish church had enjoyed; as it is said, 'Thou hast kept the good wine until now.' So again, before the glorious times of the church commence, the church's wine runs very low, and is almost out; what they alloy with is water,—human learning, sapless speculations and disputations, and dead morality. Formerly the Christian church had wine, as in the times of the primitive church, and in the times of the Reformation; but now their wine is almost gone. But after the beginning of these glorious times their water shall be turned into wine, and much better wine than ever they had before. The mother of Jesus may repre-

sent the more eminent ministers of the gospel, or the public ecclesiastical authority, as exercised in synods, public schools, &c. They, in a dark and dead time of the church, complain to Christ of their unsuccessfulness, of the want of wine in the church, and look to him for a supply. But they must not expect an answer till Christ's time is come: their prayers are not answered till then, and then they shall be fully answered: their prayers are not rejected, they are offered up with incense. The cries of the souls under the altar, that cry, 'How long, Lord, holy and true?' are not rejected; but yet it is said to them that they should wait till God's time comes. The servants represent gospel ministers; they have a command from Jesus' mother, *i. e.*, from the church in her public authority, to do whatsoever Jesus commands. Whence we may note, that the way to have a plentiful effusion of the Spirit with his Word and ordinances, is for ministers to be faithful in their work. They are to fill up the waterpots of purification with water; that is all they can do. They can, in the use of the ordinances of God's house, and the appointed means of grace and purification, be instant in season and out of season; they can fill the water-pots up to the brim; they can be abundant in preaching the Word,—which, as it comes from them, is only water,—a dead letter, a sapless, tasteless, spiritless thing,—but this is what Christ will bless for the supplying of his church with wine."—(President EDWARDS.)

Much faith followed the working of that miracle which was the "BEGINNING OF MIRACLES." May much faith also follow the preaching of the truth which the narrative of it includes!

CHRIST'S FIRST PASSOVER.

"After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples; and they continued there not many days. And the Jews' passover was at hand; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."—John ii. 12–17.

The return of Jesus from Cana, after the marriage festival, was not to Nazareth, but to Capernaum. This also was a city of Galilee, but larger and more important than Cana or Nazareth. The present was a short visit, occasioned, probably, by the approach of the passover, which required that arrangements should be made for the journey to Jerusalem, by those who contemplated keeping the feast. Jerusalem was distant about a hundred miles from Capernaum, and the roads leading to the city of solemnities being infested with robbers, the safety of travellers required that they should move in large bodies. We say, therefore, that probably, to make

arrangements for forming a caravan, did Jesus pay his present brief visit to Capernaum, accompanied by his mother as well as by his other relatives after the flesh dwelling in that country, and by the disciples whom he had already called. We have no reason to conclude, that the parties described in the narrative as his "brethren," were so in any higher sense than as being natural relatives,—associating themselves with him on this occasion either for their own convenience, or as attracted to his person by the fame of his recent miracle.

Although this visit to Capernaum was temporary, and made only because that was the place of rendezvous appointed for the company with whom he was to travel to Jerusalem, it afterwards became Christ's usual place of abode. There he did many of his mighty works; on account of which, and particularly because of its privilege in having his personal presence so much vouchsafed to it, it was "exalted to heaven." But Capernaum profited not by its great advantages. Unbelief, contempt for the Saviour's testimony and for the authority of his word, with disregard of his solemn and oft-repeated exhortations, exposed it to fearful condemnation; and in due time it was "cast down to hell,"—a monument of the fate of all "despisers," an example of the wrath which must be poured on all who set at nought God's counsel, and who will have none of his reproof. The sin of that guilty city was peculiar. It was sin of a kind which can be committed only under circumstances of a special character. Men have it in their power to become its victims only where the Lord lavishes spiritual gifts, and abounds in the precious

opportunities of his grace,—only where his voice is ever heard. On that account it is a sin all the more to be dreaded; the punishment of which is worthy of the most righteous retribution of a justly offended God. Whether *we* be under the guilt of such wickedness,—the guilt of enjoying the gospel and not obeying it,—the guilt of despising the riches of God's goodness, and thus treasuring up wrath,—it is for each of us solemnly to consider. Destruction, let us remember, when it overtakes sinners *in Zion*, is both sudden and awful, and for the most part comes when men are saying, "Peace and safety."

In the verses now before us, we are introduced to Christ's first official visit to Jerusalem,—his first visit subsequent to his baptism and entry on his public ministry,—which visit was also his first passover in his high public character. That he did go up to Jerusalem at that time, was part of that "manifesting forth of his glory" by which he not only engaged in accomplishing the great work for which he came, but confirmed the faith of the disciples, and extended his kingdom on the earth.

We shall speak, therefore, I. *Of his attendance at the passover;* II. *Of the condition in which he found the temple, and his interference therewith;* III. *Of the conviction wrought in the minds of his disciples.*

I. HIS ATTENDANCE AT THE PASSOVER: "And the Jews' passover was at hand; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."—(Ver. 13.)

I need not remind you that this was one of the three great annual festivals, on the occurrence of which, it was required that all the males should appear "before the Lord their God" at Jerusalem. From every corner of the land they were bound to assemble in the holy city, none being exempted, and none being excused from the performance of the duty, save the sick and the disabled. The ordinance was peremptory; and by making it so, God taught that his worship and service were the chief things,—taught that his worship and service were *that* attendance upon which secured, from his faithfulness, the fulfilment of his promises. No inconvenience, no prospect of risks to be incurred, could be sustained as a reason for neglect or absence. Though families and property were left apparently defenceless, in the absence of their natural protectors, special preservation was promised; and under the divine care, all was safe. God also by this ordinance instructed his people in the knowledge of the grand consummation which awaits his moral government of the world. It was the typical prediction of the glorious era which is sure to come; the era when "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob," —when "the tribes shall go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel." It is the privilege of all who love the God of the tribes of Israel, "his people which he foreknew," to anticipate the approaching joy-

ful issue of all previous conflict, toil, and suffering, when the church shall become universal, and when the ordinances, instituted by himself, and resting for their authority on his Word, to the utter exclusion of will-worship and of all human inventions, shall be sought unto by men of every name, from the rising of the sun to its going down.

1. The keeping of the passover by Jesus, showed his fulfilling of all righteousness,—the righteousness which the law given by Moses demanded. To the fulfilling of righteousness, not only moral and spiritual, but also legal and ceremonial, he was pledged by his circumcision. "He came not to destroy, but to fulfil." In him the whole typical system received its accomplishment;—in his person, his work, and sufferings, he was the very substance which all the shadows did forecast. But, as if that were not the case, and as if he were no more than any other man, the entire demands of the system were obeyed by him. The abrogation of carnal institutions having not yet come, he rendered to them a perfect submission until the time of their repeal.

2. It testified to his communion with believers of the Old Testament. Inasmuch as he partook of their sacraments, he thereby declared that he was "one body and one spirit" with them; as by instituting new sacraments for believers of the New Testament, and partaking of those sacraments too, he also declared himself to be "one body and one spirit" with them. Thus did he proclaim that believers of both dispensations constituted one family, but only in him, and through union to him; and

that all were equally partakers of the spiritual and eternal blessings which were shadowed and sealed by those sacraments. If, therefore, *we*, in this sense, "eat not of the flesh, and drink not of the blood of the Son of Man, we can have no part in him," and no part with those believers.

3. He embraced a valuable opportunity of making himself known, both by doctrine and miracle, to all the nation of the Jews. The promise was, that he should "come to his temple." For that event all the true Israel were looking, in the exercise of a living though ill-informed faith; and for that event the whole body of the Jewish people were also looking, though under the influence of their carnal impressions, and obstinate prejudices. Simeon had already been permitted to witness, in one form, the fulfilment of the promise,—to witness the coming of the Lord to his temple. Others were about to witness its fulfilment in another and more important form. And again, at the close of his public ministry, when he rode in triumph into Jerusalem, and celebrated his entrance into the temple by an act of discipline similar to that which he was about to perform on the occasion before us, a third class was to see its fulfilment. Then his coming was hailed, on his approach to the city, by parties from whom it could not have been expected, except as they acted under an impulse which they could not resist,—by parties who had recently been fired with malignant hatred, and who, after a short time, again falling under the power of the same wickedness, were to pursue him to the death. Amidst the shouts of their hosannas and adora-

tions he entered Jerusalem and the temple as the acknowledged "Son of God and King of Israel,"—the "King of Israel who came in the name of the Lord," in whom was accomplished the scripture which said, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

Surely it is necessary, for all who call themselves by Christ's name, to have respect to the will of God in his ordinances, and in all that concerns his glory, as Christ had. No institution of his can be of small importance. Respect and obedience are not that which we may or may not render at our pleasure, with indifference to his appointment, consulting only our own convenience, or listening to our own caprice, or as obeying only the common usages of the society in which our lot is cast. If we be of the mind which was in Christ, we shall seek first the glory of our Father in heaven, and along with that our own spiritual and eternal good, by all love for, and obedience to every ordinance which he hath given to the church.

II. THE CONDITION IN WHICH HE FOUND THE TEMPLE, AND HIS INTERFERENCE THEREWITH: "And found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things

hence ; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."—(Ver. 14–16.)

The description contained in verse 14, does not apply to the temple proper, but to the outer court,—the court of the Gentiles. There the scene here described was witnessed. That which gave occasion to the abuse which prevailed, an exhibition so inconsistent with the sacredness of the locality in which it occurred, was the law which required so many offerings on the various days of the feast,—offerings of oxen, and sheep, and lambs, and doves ; which, in the case of worshippers from a distance, to whom it might be inconvenient to convey them to Jerusalem, the law permitted to be purchased there. The money-changers' traffic had its origin in the legal appointment which required the offering of the half shekel of silver. Strangers coming from remote parts of the country, and not being provided with the money in the prescribed form, exchanged for it such coin or valuables as they had, and so furnished themselves with the offering in the kind which the commandment enjoined. The abuse consisted in making the temple the place in which this merchandise was carried on ; in making the very courts of God's house, where silence and order ought to have prevailed, and where there should have been nothing to interfere with the spiritual and holy worship proper to it, the market-place, into which there must have been incessantly intruding the noise and confusion and uncleanness necessarily attending such a concourse of dealers, with their flocks of living animals of the many sorts required in the services of the sanctuary. We can hardly conceive any thing more unseemly, more calcu-

lated to offend, more unsuited to the character of the place, and to the nature of the services to which that place was consecrated. Virtually the temple, in its outer court, was turned into a cattle market-stand and the usual concomitants of such places, the unholy procedure commonly connected with bargaining and traffic being at all times in full clamorous progress. Not the least grievous part of the wicked system which had thus come into use, was the interest which the priesthood had in its existence, and their conniving at it, or extending to it direct encouragement. By their permission the system prevailed, and chiefly that it might be to them the source of unhallowed gain.

Christ's interference was of a kind intended to show his official assumption and exercise of legitimate authority in his own house. In the use of a power before which all resistance yielded, he expelled the dealers and their goods; he made "a scourge of small cords," and drove them all out. The scourge was not employed on the persons of the dealers, but only with the cattle—as the scourge was suited to their nature: to their owners he issued his commands. But both the cattle and their dealers were forced to give way before him. The tables of the money-changers he overthrew; whilst he compelled the sellers of doves to remove them. The distinction in the mode of his dealing with this last class of creatures is worthy of notice. The doves, no doubt, were confined in cages. To have overturned the cages, or dealt roughly with them, might have injured or destroyed their harmless inmates. But Jesus did nothing to cause loss of property,

and nothing that was cruel. His purpose was, as the purifier of the temple, only to banish from it things which ought not to be there, that his Father's house might not be polluted by their presence. "Take these things hence," he said; "make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." Thus publicly did he declare his relation to God; thus publicly did he make known that he had come to seek his Father's glory, as well as to claim for himself the honour which belonged to him as the "only-begotten of the Father."

The temple was the house of God, because there typically, under most significant emblems, he dwelt with his people Israel. There, previous to the captivity, was the Shekinah; and thither was to come, when that emblem no longer existed, the prototype whom it represented, that the glory of the second house might, in the degree which that distinction implied, exceed the glory of the first. The temple itself was but a representation of the spiritual structure which is being reared in every successive generation throughout the world's history, the building of which Christ is master,—his Father's house, all the affairs of which are administered by him with the Father, and in his name through the agency of the Spirit; that house in which Moses was faithful as a servant, but in which Christ dwells and rules as "a son over his own house." And may we not see, in the authoritative procedure in the case before us, an example of what he at all times executes in this his own house, the church? That the unseemly spirit of merchandise should find admission

there; that any thing properly belonging to his house should be employed for ends of selfish, temporal advantage; that the salvation of men and their spiritual good should be contemplated as a secondary object in the administration of ordinances, the principal end being carnal profit, or successful competition, or party superiority,—to him how great a grief! how much must such wickedness be the very "image of jealousy which provoketh to jealousy!" how full of dishonour to himself and to his Father! Because of such evil he will "take his fan into his hand and thoroughly purge his floor;" he will lay judgment to the line, and cause it to begin at the house of God!

Christ's presence, in the power of his Spirit, is that which makes any place a house of God. Where that presence is vouchsafed, "glory fills the house." It is more than the ark, which enclosed the tables of the law, which was covered by the mercy-seat, and overshadowed by the cherubim; more than the high priest in all the magnificence of his atonement-day ornaments, the golden raiment with which he was on that day adorned; more than the Shekinah, which the high priest's eyes alone were permitted to see, and his eyes only on the occasion of the high annual solemnity; more than the hallowed fire, with all the sacredness imparted to it by the solemn sanctions by which it was guarded. Without this presence, no gorgeousness of structure,—no perfection of architectural design,—no accuracy of ceremonial form or of ecclesiastical order,—no, nor all soundness of doctrinal belief,—ever can constitute any place a true house of God.

With all these, but wanting such glory as the presence of Christ by his Spirit alone can give, instead of "a house of prayer," that which bears the name of temple may be but a "place of merchandise or a den of thieves;" whilst the heath-covered hut, in which "two or three" of his own people are met together in his name, and in which they enjoy his presence, is a temple truly consecrated,—a holy place from which sacrifices of a sweet-smelling savour ascend to the throne of the Most High. Had the generation to which the Lord came when he appeared on the earth, known these things, and had they known the time of their visitation, the glory of the latter house, predicted by the prophet Haggai, would have appeared, because of his coming to it, bright to their eyes: but they knew it not; and their house, in which they trusted still, even after they had polluted it, was soon left unto them desolate. Ought not modern ceremonialists of every name to be warned? Are not the things recorded in such portions of the Word as we are now considering, written as ensamples unto them, and unto all who persuade themselves that services merely external, services earthly and carnal, can be pleasing to God, or profitable to them?

In the interference of the Saviour with the parties who in the temple excited his indignation, it is impossible for us not to see the evidence of his essential glory as the "Son of God," as well as of his administrative authority as "the King of Israel." Singly and unarmed he rose against those merchants who desecrated his Father's house. A stranger, alone, unsupported, unaided by any earthly influence, he opposed himself not

only to the immediate actors in the scene before him, but to the priesthood, the more guilty parties in the profanity which he denounced. He detected and exposed their hypocrisy, he opposed himself to their cupidity, he mortified their pride,—he covered them with disgrace. No man resisted,—all fled before him. What prevented their rising against him, their treating his zeal with contempt, and summarily suppressing his career of impetuous reformation? To human view all the advantages were on their side, and none were on his. The smallest measure of self-possession ought to have availed to make them resent the affront offered them, or to punish the violence from which they suffered. They did it not; for, though unconscious of it, they were in that presence from which the sea fled, and Jordan was driven back, when the mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. Well might they have been asked, "What ailed you?" Ah, for the time they yielded to a power to which universal nature is subject! "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters." After a little they so far recovered themselves as to demand "a sign" in proof and vindication of his assumed magisterial functions; but in the meantime they submitted, they bowed before him. It was but a little till they reverted to the provocation which he now so signally reproved, and compelled another scene of purging and denunciation, such as had now occurred; but in the meantime they gave way, and no man laid hands on him! If

Jesus "manifested forth his glory" as the great Creator, when, at his will, the water was changed into wine; he now manifested it as the King of Israel, the universal Lord, in the exercise of a supremacy in his church which no one could venture to gainsay.

III. THE CONVICTION WROUGHT IN THE MINDS OF THE DISCIPLES: They "remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."—(Ver. 17.)

To their minds it was suggested, that in him whom they had chosen, and whom they now followed,—and in what they had now witnessed,—was particularly fulfilled the word of God in the 69th Psalm, here quoted. In David it had received its primary accomplishment; but in the psalmist only, or chiefly, as he was a prefiguration of another. Now they saw the truth exemplified in him of whom the Spirit spake in those words by the mouth of David. The disciples were not ignorant of the Scriptures, and not oblivious of the things which they there read;—a condition most valuable for profiting aright under the instruction from above when it is given. When the Word is received, and abides in us, it is a seed which the breath of God can quicken, so that faith will be nourished by it, and the soul receive from it the appointed benefit. If the Word be not hid in our heart, how can such a blessing come on us?

In the language here quoted, the love of Christ, his earnest desire for the salvation of men, and for the glory of God in their salvation, are described. As fire eats up that on which it lights, so did his zeal operate and show itself. Of this zeal it is written: "Love is strong as death;

jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." By his "Eternal Spirit Christ offered himself,"—offered his person,—his humanity,—the body prepared for him, and his human soul which inhabited that body,—"offered *himself* unto God." His Eternal Spirit is the offerer,—his assumed nature is the sacrifice presented. His Eternal Spirit is the altar, and his humanity the victim which was laid upon it; the one is the Sustainer, the other is the thing sustained. Behold in this offering the zeal of his house which ate him up; behold the same in the fire which kindled on him, like the fire which fell on the sacrifices at the original dedication of the tabernacle and temple. See Jesus under a consuming flame, which ceased not to burn until all that the righteousness of God, of the righteous Judge, demanded at the hand of the Substitute for sinners was endured,—endured to the last jot,—endured till the very uttermost farthing was paid. "Herein *indeed* was love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,"—gave him, who "bore our sins in his own body on the accursed tree." The completion of this offering of love,—of the zeal which "ate him up,"—of the fire which consumed him,—was witnessed on Calvary, when he uttered his piercing cry there, and when, the agony being past, he at length exclaimed, "It is finished:" but it began now. By the cleansing of the temple, in the form in which it was done, on this his first official visit to Jerusalem, he performed his first great public act in challenge of the

"rulers of the darkness of this world," whom he had come to defy, to combat, and to overthrow. That act was as the sound of the battle-trumpet summoning them to the conflict. However dismayed, they did not decline the onset. The "prince of this world" came forth in his might; and from this time the war, which ceased only with Satan's being cast out and falling like lightning to the ground, had its commencement. The public cleansing of the temple introduced Jesus to sorrows which ended only with his death. This he foresaw; and foreseeing it, he cheerfully gave his "back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them who plucked off the hair, not withholding himself from shame and spitting." Thus he took the cup which his Father gave him to drink, that, "travelling in the greatness of his strength," he might, through death, destroy him that had the power of death,—he might spoil principalities and powers, and lead captivity captive.

Is not Christ, in the public act here detailed, an example to us?—to all who are debtors to his grace?—to all who have his life abiding in them? Shall we be indifferent to dishonour done to God's name? Shall we hear it blasphemed and be unmoved? Shall we see his authority despised and not defend it? If love for him exist in us, shall not the spirit of Paul at Athens, or of the Baptist with Herod, animate us? The language applied to the Saviour in this verse was, in some sense, applied to David. Of the servant it was true as well as of the Lord, that the zeal of God's house ate him up. Surely it is for us to see that of us it shall be true; and

all the more, as there is reason to fear that even good men sometimes tremble to stand for their Lord, shrink from the danger it may involve, restrain their testimony, or make it partial or defective.

Our zeal must, indeed, begin with ourselves. It must, in the first instance, be chiefly exercised upon the corruption and evils which prevail within ourselves. But, though it begin there, it must not stop there; it must not be limited in its object to self. This were to be of the spirit of Cain, to act as if we said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" By so doing we may have the blood of our brother's soul on our conscience. The lepers who sat at the gate of Samaria, who made the discovery of the flight of the Syrian host, and who thus had committed to them the secret of the abundance which God had provided to meet the famine of the perishing multitudes in the city, would have been guilty of the death of every man who died of want after they had obtained their knowledge, had they not gone and told what their eyes had seen, and their hands had handled, and their mouths had tasted. It is impossible we can know Christ, as our Saviour, our portion, our all, and not seek to commend him to others, to commend him earnestly,—not seek to bring all men to him, that they may see his glory, and taste the riches of his goodness.

Our zeal is not to be false in principle, whilst the object seems, in our ignorance, to be good: not such as that of Paul when he was yet a persecutor. It is not to be zeal out of proportion to the end which it contemplates at any time; as when the Pharisees made so great

a work of small matters, tithing their mint, and rue, and cummin,—neglecting the weighty things of the kingdom. The animating principle of our zeal must be the pure grace of the love of God: to preserve his truth inviolate, his worship pure, his service free; to make the gospel known to all, near and afar off; and to exalt Christ, resist sin, and seek to perfect holiness, its objects. How much knowledge does true zeal require! how much discretion! how much of the wisdom which cometh down from above! and what unremitting constancy! 'Tis a fire which can never be permitted to go out, but must ever be cherished. As the breath of God alone can kindle it, the breath of God alone can sustain it; and the use of holy ordinances, with constant and well-directed efforts in every sphere of usefulness, must ever supply the fuel.

DISPUTE WITH THE JEWISH RULERS.

"Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."—John ii. 18–25.

The passage which formed the subject of the previous lecture introduces us to Christ's first visit to Jerusalem after his baptism and his return from the wilderness of temptation,—his first official visit. It was made that he might keep his first passover, the first after his entry on his public ministry. The great act of authority by which on that occasion he purged the temple, by driving out of it the buyers and the sellers, we have already spoken of. It was an act performed in fulfilment of the Scriptures, and a token of the exalted office with

which he was invested,—a token that he had come not as a servant to a house not his own, but as a Son to his own house.

We have now to speak, I. *Of the dispute which followed this proceeding,—including the remonstrance on the part of the Jews, and the Saviour's reply;* II. *The present and remote effects of that reply on the minds of the disciples;* and, III. *The general results of his attendance on the passover on this occasion.*

I. THE DISPUTE WHICH FOLLOWED HIS PROCEEDING IN THE TEMPLE.

1. *The remonstrance addressed to him by the Jews.* The parties who did remonstrate, and who put themselves in an attitude of hostility, were the *authorities* of the temple: "Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?"—(Ver. 18.) So speaking, they openly espoused the cause of the traffickers in the house of the Lord, and in such terms replied to the authoritative words which had been addressed to them when the Lord said, "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." "Inasmuch as thou doest these things," was virtually their reply,—"inasmuch as thou assumest the place of power, the office of some great one commissioned for a work so solemn as that of changing the long established practices connected with the services of this place, show a sign by which we may be assured of thy commission, and may know thy right so to interfere."

In making this demand, the Jews proceeded according

to their usual rebellious manner, of resisting the gospel, and of manifesting their unbelief. The nations of the Gentiles were, in the form peculiar to themselves, guilty of the same sin as the Jews after their fashion committed. Comparing the one with the other as to the form of their wickedness in this matter, the apostle says, "The *Jews* require a sign,"—that is, the Jews, having no sign with which they can satisfy themselves, put away from them the word of life; "the *Greeks* seek after wisdom,"—that is, the Greeks, on their part, pretending that they find no philosophy in the gospel, put it away too. The want of a satisfactory "sign" to confirm the joyful sound, made it a "stumbling-block" to the one: the want of "wisdom," the wisdom of their schools, made it "foolishness" to the other. Yet to all, whether of the Jews or of the Greeks, who were called,—to all who were made the subjects of the grace of true salvation,—the gospel proved, in their happy experience, the *power* of God and the *wisdom* of God. Thus the Jew, called, became abundantly satisfied with the gospel according to his adopted test, satisfied with its signs; and the Greek, called, became abundantly satisfied according to his test, satisfied with its wisdom and knowledge.

It may be objected, that nothing unreasonable marked the conduct of the authorities of the temple, in the instance before us, when they demanded a "sign." All men were in expectation of the Messiah. Of him it had been foretold that when he came he should purge his temple. John the Baptist taught this, and led his hearers to anticipate a time of winnowing, a time when the Lord should

"throughly purge his floor." The ancient prophets had taught the same thing in most alarming predictions. When, therefore, the authoritative procedure on Christ's part which we have seen occurred; when his pretensions to the Messiahship were so set forth,—and his act was evidently assumed to be, and virtually announced to be, the fulfilment of what had been foretold,—it seems reasonable that the Jews should have required a "sign" in evidence of his mission, a sign to prove him to be the "Messenger of the covenant," as he so clearly demanded they should believe that he was. In this view, had their remonstrance been made with an honest mind, and with an upright object, we must have approved of it. But no one can fail to see that the case was not so; but that, in their conduct on this occasion, their carnality and unbelief prevailed, and could not be concealed.

The remonstrance was the fruit of wrath,—the fruit of disappointment that their sinful gain had been interfered with. It was not made in any sense, or in any degree, with the desire to receive information regarding the Messiah and the claims of Jesus, or to be brought under conviction of the truth. Far from being in the spirit of longing for the revelation of Him who was to come,—such a condition of soul as that of the aged Simeon,—their aim reached not even to that of the young ruler, who, in a measure, however small, of honest desire after spiritual good, addressed himself to the Saviour. Their address to him was in the very spirit of that of the Gadarenes. Not less degraded in heart and life than these rejecters of Christ, they loved their mercantile

interests more than the Lord who bought them, and were as bent as the swine dealers on dismissing him, on having him to depart from them; because they obviously associated his departure with the peaceable pursuit of their unhallowed trade.

Their remonstrance proceeded also on the persuasion that he was either unable or unwilling to give a "sign," though he had already afforded such evidence of his mission as ought to have sufficiently satisfied them. That he had executed the act of his mediatorial office at which they took such exception, in such circumstances, should have been enough to supply them with all the evidence they could reasonably expect. Alone, with only a scourge of small cords in his hand,—no other ensign of power accompanying his act; by his voice, his look; in the absence of any outward emblem of which men, naturally or from habit, stand in awe; he had cleared the temple. A secret homage of the will had been paid to him, of which they had been conscious in themselves. And no "sign from heaven," such as they pretended to seek, could have been more convincing to their minds. When, therefore, they demanded such a thing, it could be only as a pretext to conceal or excuse the wickedness of their rebellious hearts.

If it still be urged in behalf of the Jews, that none of Christ's mighty works had yet been done, and that the parties before us were probably ignorant of the great "beginning of miracles" by which he "manifested forth his glory" at Cana of Galilee, we must remember that the witnessing of his mighty works, when that actually came to pass, made

no change in them or in other objectors of the same class. They exhibited the same spirit, and employed the same cavil then as they did now. For example: after the miracle by which Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fishes, when he demanded that they should believe on him whom God had sent, their reply was, "What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?"—(John vi. 30.) So, too, when on the very eve of his departure out of the world, at the period when his entire course was nearly completed, after he had, for the second time, purged the temple in a form exactly the same as that in which he had done it at the commencement of his public ministry; then, as on previous occasions, their response to the appeal thus so powerfully made to their consciences and hearts, was, "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?"

In the disputers whose conduct is expounded in this passage, we have the true type of those who always oppose themselves to the truth. The ostensible ground of their opposition, or of their rejection of it, is the want of satisfactory evidence,—of satisfactory tokens of God's power and presence with the truth; whilst the real explanation of the unbelief by which they perish is the evil of their hearts,—hearts pre-occupied by, and cheerfully given to the world and to sin. Though joined to their idols, and hardened in the course chosen for themselves, they may, perchance, under appeals made to their understanding and their conscience, be shaken for an instant, but they soon recover; and then they cavil, resist, and reject. Thus did

the authorities of the temple at first quail for a moment before Christ,—in terror they avoided his presence; but immediately afterward we behold them return to their own way, "answering again," and setting at nought the influence to which they had momentarily submitted. Thus Balaam was subdued for a time under the overpowering conviction of his nearness to God and of his immediate responsibility to him; but he soon escaped from the alarm which occasioned his bondage, reverted to his worldliness, and sold himself for filthy lucre, to work out, as best he could, the injury of Israel,—a people whom, by God's authority, and under God's direction, he had pronounced blessed,—that Israel whom, as he well knew, none might curse.

Let us tremble, brethren, lest the hearts of any of *us* should be in such a condition,—should be hardened after the same manner of unbelief. Have we not abundant evidence that Christ has come, and that he is in the midst of us? Could stronger evidence or more solid ground of assurance of that truth be given, were a sign from heaven granted? It may be the secret thought of some, that were great and notable works done in our day, as in the time when Christ was on earth, we should be more deeply impressed than we are now; that were we but permitted to see things such as we read were done in days that are past, we should earnestly and with all our heart become disciples. But wherein does such a persuasion differ from his, who in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and who, singling out the only one of all the saints in heaven with whom he had

been acquainted on earth, prayed that he might be sent to him across the great gulf as a messenger of comfort; who, when that petition failed, prayed again that the same messenger might be sent to his father's house to warn them who were there of his fate, that they might repent and be saved; and when that petition received, as its reply, the answer, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them," who rejoined, "*Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent*"? In these words that lost soul virtually charged God with having withheld from him that which would have convinced him,—which would have turned him from his evil ways, and have saved him from hell! Of a character equally blasphemous are thoughts which suggest that "signs and wonders" would effectually put an end to the want of faith on the earth. Let all who entertain such sentiments,—all who seek for "signs and wonders" in confirmation of the truth of the "glorious gospel," and who predict that until these revisit the church, its prosperous time will not arrive,—ponder well the final award in the appeal of which we are speaking: "IF THEY HEAR NOT MOSES AND THE PROPHETS, NEITHER WILL THEY BE PERSUADED, THOUGH ONE ROSE FROM THE DEAD." Such a sign, or any sign, could not make the word of everlasting life more certain than it is, as we have it written by God, and as he can seal it on the heart by the Spirit.

2. *The reply of Jesus to the Jews' remonstrance.* He did answer them, and that with perfect knowledge of the state of their hearts: "Jesus answered and said unto

them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."—(Ver. 19.)

There were two senses in which this language might be received by his hearers. They might understand it as referring to the building within the vestibule of which they were then assembled; or they might understand it as referring to, and meaning his body. The 21st verse expressly states, that Jesus "spake of the temple of his body:" and we may believe that by some significant gesture, as perhaps by pointing to his person, he indicated that of which he actually spake. But they pretended not to understand him. That this was pretence, and that they prevaricated when they replied as they did, may be inferred from the words of the 21st verse, quoted above; but that the case was so, that they did understand Christ in the sense he intended they should, is put beyond question by Matt. xxvii. 63, where we read, that when the same parties gave to Pilate an account of Christ's statement on this occasion, they declared that he had said, "After three days I will rise again."

It is not necessary that we should occupy time in discussing the question which has been raised as to the temple then existing, and as to the time occupied in the work of building it; whether it was the temple which had been built by Zerubbabel or that which had been built by Herod. The original structure had certainly been reared by Zerubbabel, and he had been engaged for a lengthened, a culpably lengthened period in the work. The time of its reconstruction by Herod, as recorded by Josephus, was, in like manner, long protracted, and probably

occupied "forty and six years," as stated in verse 20; but the matter is not of importance. The Jews were proud of their temple,—of its costly stones, rich decorations, and vast extent. Their regard, if not idolatrous, was highly superstitious. To speak against the temple, therefore, was no mean offence; and we may well believe that they were but too willing to misconstrue Christ's words, with the view of having an opportunity of fastening a charge on him, and of exciting the multitude to become his enemies. As here they said, "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" replying to his answer when they required a sign; so one of the accusations against him, when at length he was arraigned before the tribunal at which he was condemned, referred to the terms of this very answer, misinterpreted, however, as they here showed their inclination to do, and in pursuance of the same wicked policy.

The reply of Jesus as it actually was meant by him is what we have at present to deal with: "*He spake of the temple of his body.*" The material temple was but the symbol of this, the real temple; of this, the "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." The human nature of Christ is the only temple of God, in the right sense. In one respect, believers are temples of God, for he dwells in them; but it is only as they are of Christ, as they are partakers of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. He, the Head, is the real temple,—a truth of which this evangelist speaks, when he says, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father."

In that human nature God dwells. Of him there can be no truthful worship but in the temple so provided, and but as the worshippers are connected with it; an order the knowledge of which is indispensable to salvation. The worship we speak of, is not that of what is called the temple of the universe,—the heavens and the earth; as if in that framework God did specially reveal his glory, or as if there that glory were specially seen to be adored: and it is not worship in any material temple whatever; as if to wait on outward services were all that is required. These are but the surrounding firmament which reflects the dazzling lustre of the real dwelling-place of the Most High. The person of Christ is the temple; the man Christ Jesus alone is the high priest ministering there; he is the altar too, and the sacrifice, and the incense; all that sinners require to know that they may worship God, and all that is ordained for their salvation,—all that is ordained that they may come to God, that they may be restored to their true relation to him, that they may be entitled to his heavenly kingdom, that they may worship him in spirit and in truth, and that they may be qualified for the full enjoyment for ever and ever of the divine fellowship in heaven; in short, he is himself the revelation of God's glory to sinners.

"Destroy this temple," said he. "Ye shall do it: according to your own impression of effective destruction, ye shall so deal by him who now stands before you: do so; destroy this temple, and I, in three days, 'will raise it up,' —that shall be the sign." In so speaking, Christ declared the glory which belonged to him. He had power to lay down his life, and power to take it up again; a truth which

he now announced in the terms thus employed by him. So, on another occasion, he said: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Such was his reply,—a reply adequate and appropriate. The death and resurrection of the future Messiah, as the Jews ought to have known, formed the grand subject of all the types and prophecies by which they professed that their faith was guided. However unbelief might conceal the only legitimate application as well as exposition of the prophecies, it was so. The same glorious truth forms for time and eternity the abiding security of all saved sinners. Christ "was delivered for their offences, and was raised again for their justification:" therefore to "know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death," is unquestionably the essential element of their blessed hope. For these reasons, the reply of the Saviour to the demand of the Jews was adequate and appropriate; but it was so also, because that, from the beginning, Jesus had sought to disabuse the minds of his disciples, and of all who heard him, of earthly views of his kingdom, and of earthly expectations therefrom. His was to be no carnal splendour, and no carnal pomp;—the servant in that was to be as his Lord. His was to be a life of suffering and sorrow, (the servant was not to be different in that either,) and a death of pain and ignominy. But though, through

weakness, he was voluntarily to submit to die, his death was to be followed by a glorious resurrection, a glorious resurrection through his own power,—the "power of God."

Let us accept this sign. "Christ both died, and rose, and revived, and is now the Lord both of the dead and living." Having humbled himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, he is now exalted at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. He is now the Forerunner within the veil; "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead." We look for admission to heaven at last solely on this ground. Contemplate, then, with steady eye, this great sight,—the temple destroyed, but raised up! Already, if we are worshippers in that temple, we sit with Christ in heavenly places: such unity is there of all the members with the body, whether in heaven or on earth; and such unity is there with the Head. Here is our hope,—and hope besides it we have none. Let us be joyful in our King; but let us be prepared to follow in the path in which he has gone before; let us be so prepared, though, like him, we should be pursued of the enemy unto such destruction as that of the "temple;" and let us consider him that endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds. We "have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

II. THE PRESENT AND REMOTE EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S REPLY ON THE MINDS OF THE DISCIPLES.

1. As to the effect *at the time Christ spake,* there seems

to have been none. The disciples were evidently ignorant of the vital truth of the future death and resurrection of their Lord. Of many things relating to his kingdom they were then in much darkness, but of none of its mysteries were they so profoundly and obtusely ignorant as of this. Abundant information was given to instruct them in the knowledge of the coming decease,—information communicated on all occasions, up to the very eve of the dreadful event. But notwithstanding, though forewarned in the plainest and most express terms of what was at hand, their minds were shut against what was spoken. When the death had actually been suffered, it made no change on their minds,—they then looked for no resurrection; and when that glorious triumph over the last enemy occurred, it was an issue for which they were not prepared. The women who had come to the sepulchre to complete the funeral ceremonies were taken by surprise when made to know that the Lord had risen indeed; and all the disciples were slow of heart to believe the fact on their evidence, convincing though their testimony ought to have been. This blindness, we cannot doubt, was to be ascribed to their secular views of the expected kingdom of the Messiah; views which, by the power which they exerted over their minds, perverted all their convictions. They loved Christ,—they were saved by him,—they followed him; yet such was the effect of their preconceived expectations, that the darkness resisted every approach of light, and seemed as if it were impossible it should ever be dispelled. How often is such dulness of apprehension the case of real believers! What obtuseness and obscurity prevail

even in them as to much glorious truth! Blessed be God, all darkness will by-and-by be chased away, and in his own light we shall see light,—eye to eye contemplating his glory, with unity of conviction as well as of love.

It pleased the Lord that the blindness of his disciples, on the point of which we are speaking, should be removed only by experience,—by *seeing* what he had previously predicted. Though they did not comprehend what he spake, they laid it up in their minds. It had a place there,—remaining meanwhile, however ineffectual as to every practical purpose. They never cavilled nor resisted,—if we except the one inadvertent word, "That be far from thee, Lord;" a word which was met by a severity of rebuke that might have taught how serious the offence which it involved was felt to be. The words of Christ had a place in their minds,—existing there like precious seed covered by the clods of the valley,—to the senses lost, and apparently cast away, but not lost really. The time came when life-giving influences operated, when the Spirit put forth his energy, and when the truth, without power previously, was awakened into vital activity. Then the promise which had been given,—a promise, the real import of which was not more apprehended than the truth to which it had special reference,—received fulfilment: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

2. The *remote* effect of Christ's reply to the Jews on the minds of the disciples was, on the fulfilment of his word, most blessed: "When therefore he was risen from the

dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them: and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."—(Ver. 22.) The breath of the Spirit quickened the truth which lay, until that period, in their souls. The seed had not fallen into sterile ground, had not perished in the soil which received it; therefore when the time came, it sprang up, and produced its precious fruit. The word which Jesus had spoken with his own lips, and also the word which he had given in the Scriptures, they then believed, and their faith was established. When Jesus was glorified, they remembered many precious things which they understood not at the first were written of him, and truly saw that they were fulfilled in and by him. Why did this not happen till he was glorified? Because then, and not till then, the Spirit was given; because then light, understanding, life, and spiritual action, were imparted to their souls as they had not previously been.

Exactly similar is the experience of the church at all times. Though our minds are familiar with the words of the Lord,—though we hear them, and they enter our understanding, or lodge in our memory,—no saving or salutary effect immediately follows,—none till his time of power has come. But then, as the Lord may order it, and as grace may be communicated, we remember, we believe, we are affected, we are subdued and sanctified, or we are refreshed and comforted!

What an argument have we in this for instructing the young—the youngest—in the knowledge of sublime, precious, Scripture truths,—even truths the most sublime!

It is usually objected that children cannot understand these things. But neither did the disciples understand the things which the Lord spake to them, and ceased not to speak, though they understood them not,—which he spake, that he might lodge the truth, even amidst spiritual darkness, in their souls. It was part of his plan that they should hear, and be exercised with things which, at the time they were uttered, they did not understand. It is the same in his dealings with us,—with all who are under his teaching. None of us *understand*, however much we may know, till *his* time comes. How different is our understanding of the *law*, when our knowledge is only that of the "letter," from what it becomes afterwards, when we are taught by the saving conviction of the "Spirit!" Then we understand it. Then, too, but not till then, we understand the truth that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness; and we are made to apprehend the true meaning of all the grace promised. The letter of the promise was previously familiar to us, but it existed as a shadowy imagination, devoid of practical benefit: now it has become a great reality. If the case be so, how imperative is the duty of prayer connected with instruction,—prayer for the "excellency of the power," "for times of refreshing," for the "former and the latter rain." If all the care that we feel be to sow the seed of the kingdom, and if there be none, or little, felt for the divine influence, on the coming of which the whole benefit of the Word preached is suspended, what can we expect the result to be? Let us ever cry: "Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices

thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."

III. THE GENERAL RESULTS OF CHRIST'S PRESENT ATTENDANCE AT THE PASSOVER: "In the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."—(Ver. 23–25.)

He wrought many miracles "when he was at Jerusalem at the passover,"—miracles which are not narrated by this evangelist: he was intent on his Father's work. In that way he "manifested forth his glory,"—in that way he commended his message,—in that way, as by all his ministry, he proved how willingly he would have gathered his children to himself, as a bird gathereth her brood under her wings: but they would not. One of the days, called the "feast day,"—perhaps a day like that elsewhere distinguished by the name of the "last day, that great day of the feast"—of the feast of which it formed one—is specially named as the day on which he particularly revealed his glory by wonderful works.

Thus fulfilling his mission, "many believed on his name." By Christ's *name*, as employed in this connection, it appears we are to understand his doctrine; as well as his pretensions to the Messiahship, declared by his word of testimony. They who "believed" in some sense received that testimony. A persuasion inclining them to believe that he was of God, that he was the

Messiah who was to come, was produced in their minds. Thus much only; for we have no ground on which to conclude that, in the case of those here spoken of, there was any saving faith, any actual closing with Christ for eternal life. In Nicodemus, whose case is fully detailed in the next chapter, we have an example of the parties alluded to, and of the progress which, as there described, they made under Christ's teaching on the occasion. They may have been of those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel, and who were watching the "signs of the times." They saw the miracles of Christ and heard his word. By these they were convinced,—convinced to the extent expressed by Nicodemus,—"Thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him:" but that was all. There was a breaking up of the fallow ground; the ploughshare was passing through it, with a view, at least in the case of some of them, to future and farther progress: that was all. They might think their attainments great, and their profession satisfactory; but Nicodemus, at least, was in due time taught that which they all required to be taught,—the short distance such belief could conduct him on the way to true rest, and how much besides he needed. So likewise must we be taught. Of us it may be true that *we believe;* but if our faith be only that of the believers spoken of in this scripture, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

The Saviour did not commit himself unto them, as he would have done had they been true and confirmed believers. The reason is given: "He knew all men,"—he could make distinctions, and no mere profession could

deceive him. *We* readily take up with a profession of change of sentiments and change of convictions: He made little account of it; for "there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight, all things are naked and open unto him with whom we have to do,"—the heart as well as the outward appearance, whereas we can see but the latter. Here he did not commit himself to man. In Peter's case he did commit himself. Peter he trusted; for Peter might have said, even from the first, notwithstanding his many defects, "Lord, thou knowest all things, *thou knowest* that I love thee." Jesus knew the professors by whom he was surrounded at this feast at Jerusalem, but it was not by information derived from others. He needed no such information; he required the testimony of no man, either to his own character or to the character of his neighbours. As "over all, God blessed for ever," as the Searcher of hearts, Jesus knew all men, and knew all that was in them. Such is His glory with whom we have to do,—the glory of him who has come to his temple,—a glory the sense of which it becomes us ever to have present to our minds. Let us say continually, "Thou, O God, seest us,"—and let us endure as seeing him who is invisible; let us listen to David's solemn injunction to Solomon his son; let us hear it as spoken to ourselves: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."

THE NIGHT VISIT OF NICODEMUS TO JESUS.

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—John iii. 1–3.

The concluding verses of the preceding chapter detail the general results of the miracles and preaching of Christ at the passover: "Many believed in his name;" many assented to his doctrine; many gave him credit for being a divine messenger,—the Messiah: but no more. Jesus did not commit himself to the parties thus spoken of; he did not sustain their profession as satisfactory,—his knowledge of them, as the Searcher of all hearts, from whom nothing can be hid, to whose eyes all things are naked and open, forbade it. In the first portion of that chapter on which we have now entered, there is brought under our notice the case of one of those professed believers, and the mode of Christ's dealing with it. As we may conclude that the party thus selected was a favourable specimen of the class whom he represented, the narrative is, on that account, rendered the more in-

teresting and important. May the Spirit teach us as we examine it.

In the verses now under our notice we have,—I. *The description of the person of Nicodemus;* II. *His visit to Jesus, and what he spake to the Lord;* and, III. *The direct reply of Christ.*

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSON OF NICODEMUS: "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews."—(Ver. 1.)

1. His name was Nicodemus. Though little can be said of him beyond what occurs in this Gospel, such notices as exist in contemporary history favour the idea that Nicodemus was a person of rank. He certainly was one of the great Sanhedrim of Jerusalem, which of itself implied distinction and influence.

2. His religious denomination was that of the Pharisees,—a sect who, from their extreme bigotry, were most bitterly opposed to Jesus and his doctrine; yet a party who, but for the strength of their prejudices, from their knowledge of the Scriptures and of the prophecies referring to the Messiah, were better qualified than many others to discover the evidences confirmatory of Christ's pretensions, and to determine the question of his claims. Although so hostile as a body, there were not wanting among them individuals who yielded themselves to the power of the truth. At the hands of some of them Jesus received much kindness, being not unfrequently a guest in their houses; while some also became his true followers. According to human probability their condition was very

hopeless,—that even of publicans and harlots being better; yet of their number some were, through grace, made "Israelites indeed," and of "the true circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, who rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." The arrows of the King pierced their hearts through all the panoply peculiar to such subjects of the kingdom of darkness; and the life of God took possession of their souls, notwithstanding the resistance of corruption, even in the form it in their case necessarily assumed. Of this Paul was a notable instance, who, whatever his previous self-righteous pride and self-sufficiency had been, rejoiced then to acknowledge himself a debtor to grace,—to grace alone.

3. His office was that of "ruler of the Jews:" he was a member of the great council of the nation, as we have already said, of the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem. To this court extensive jurisdiction belonged. While the lesser Sanhedrims or councils, both in Jerusalem and generally in the cities throughout the land, despatched all the affairs of justice arising within their respective localities, the great council presided over the affairs of the whole kingdom, received appeals from the lesser Sanhedrims, interpreted the laws, and regulated the execution of them. Some, not all, of the members were expounders of the law,—generally the most learned and faithful; and of them was Nicodemus,—probably an eminent man of that class. Although the words which he spake when he came to Christ were guarded and carefully weighed, and his whole manner manifested the absence of that open boldness which right conviction of the truth ought ever to

produce, yet it was no small evidence of his subjection to the power of what he had seen and heard during the passover, that he professed himself a convert to the extent which he did. This was his first step, under divine direction, in his progress towards the rest of the everlasting covenant. He knew it not, but in taking that step he had been apprehended of God; and though to flesh and blood most repugnant that he should walk in the course on which he had now entered, he did walk in it. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,"—but some are; for God will thereby show the sovereign power of divine grace. He is no respecter of persons; he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and none can interfere with him,—a truth which, at the same time that it is honouring to his majesty, must ever be the confidence and joy of all his own people.

II. The visit of Nicodemus to Jesus, and what he spake to the Lord: "The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."—(Ver. 2.)

1. He came to him by night. He chose that season, and sought Jesus out in the place where he had made his abode,—probably beyond the walls of the city, perhaps at Bethany, or whithersoever he had, in distrust of men, and in testimony of his knowledge of their real character, withdrawn himself. Fear, no doubt, prompted Nicodemus to choose the season of the night.

Among the chief rulers, we read that *many believed*,—possibly after the manner of his belief; but they dared not confess, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. He, however, ventured, under shelter of the curtain of darkness, to seek Jesus; and, in his person as well as in the words which he uttered when he came, this counsellor evidently represented the others, and sought instruction for them as well as for himself.

There may have been other reasons besides that which we have supposed to make him choose the night season. He may have had no other time in which his visit could be paid. The business of the passover might just have ended, and the first moment after the close of its services have been seized by him to satisfy his longing soul in holding intercourse with the Lord. His personal convenience he therefore readily sacrificed to his sense of solemn duty; he obeyed the impulse by which he felt himself moved; and, night though it was, he presented himself to the Great Teacher, and desired to sit at his feet.

Such may be the explanation of his nocturnal visit; but it appears more likely that a sinful fear of his hostile colleagues actuated him, and produced the clandestine application to Jesus, the account of which is now to be considered. We incline to this opinion the more readily, that such a course is in entire consistency with much of his subsequent conduct, even after he had received the lessons of divine instruction from the Saviour which are detailed in this chapter. We allude more particularly to his ambiguous testimony in favour of Jesus in the presence of the council, when the officers who had been sent to appre-

hend him returned and gave account of the result of their mission in the strong terms of admiration which they employed concerning him,—to the contrast, so unfavourable to Nicodemus, the contrast between their ardour and his provoking coldness; and also to another occasion, somewhat similar, the occasion when his utterance in defence of the Lord was so feeble compared with that of the man born blind, whose eyes had been opened. In the end, Nicodemus was delivered from the culpable timidity which caused him to hide his light under a bushel, and which made his Christianity the doubtful thing which to bolder and more consistent disciples it must have appeared to be; but, throughout, the fear of man seems to have been his infirmity.

2. His address to the Saviour expressed his convictions regarding him; it was, in short, his confession. In approaching, he employs the term of highest respect,—"RABBI!" When we remember that Jesus was now only thirty years of age, that there is reason to think also he was of mean appearance; and that, on the other hand, Nicodemus must have been somewhat advanced in life,—being one of the elders, a ruler, a public teacher, bearing in his person, as he must have been conscious, the prestige of the dignity of office; it certainly manifested most wonderful homage on his part to ascribe to Jesus the title which he did, particularly when we view Nicodemus as acting merely on carnal principles,—acting either from natural curiosity or from a desire simply to increase his knowledge, and not as a quickened soul moved by the promptings of a living faith.

His confession is properly contained in these words: "We know that thou art a teacher come from God." Whatever he meant by this, Nicodemus spake from the heart,—spake what he believed. We have no reason to conclude that he had any right understanding of the sense in which it was true that Jesus had "come from God." He did not as yet understand this as John the Baptist understood language of the same kind which he had employed; nor even as Nathanael understood what he spake, when he said, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." Nicodemus expressed no more than his conviction that Jesus was some great teacher sent or raised up of God, as the ancient prophets were, or as, perhaps, he would admit John the Baptist was, —no more than that the things which he taught were divine truths, received from God, and that they were of a nature to glorify him;—so making a difference between Jesus and the ordinary Jewish teachers, who were not, in the same sense, from God, but of man, and commissioned by mere human authority.

"We know," he said,—purporting that the council, either as a body or in many of its members, had occupied themselves with the question of Christ's claims. It was but a short time since a deputation of their number had held conference with John the Baptist on the subject of his pretensions to be the Messiah. They had learned from him, when for himself he positively denied all pretensions to such glory, that there stood among them One whom they knew not, whose claim was good, and must in due time be acknowledged. Christ had now appeared, and

at this passover he had done his mighty works, at the same time that he had taught his great truths. Their attention had been arrested, their curiosity awakened; and the result, at least in the case of one individual of their number, was the visit which he now made.

"We know,"—by which there was further implied, either some accusation against his colleagues, that they concealed their convictions,—not confessing them as he did, clandestine as the form was which he had chosen,—or that in the confession which he now made, he spoke for them as well as for himself, and declared their common sentiment.

In whatever way we understand this expression, it is evident that the place which those men occupied was a snare to them, and the occasion of danger to their precious souls. They were in alarm for their credit, or for their position and appointments, as public teachers. These seemed to be compromised by the light which shone forth in Christ, in his doctrine, and in the signs which confirmed his doctrine. To obey the secret convictions of their minds presented no prospect but that of worldly ruin; yet, to resist them could only induce the torture and dreadful calamity of an evil conscience and the frown of God. The alternative which was chosen, almost universally, by the council we know. They loved this present world,—they loved the praise of man; and that love proved too powerful a principle to be subdued by that which they "knew," and of which they were secretly persuaded, concerning Jesus. Alas! how many have perished, being snared in the same way, being cut off from the

gospel, and excluded from the grace of God in the gospel, because they would not separate themselves from their worldly connections, or sacrifice the objects of their earthly regard!

3. This address, moreover, expressed the grounds on which the convictions of Nicodemus rested: "For," said he, "no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." The character and number of Christ's miracles had impressed him and his colleagues: they had produced the conclusion that they were really performed by the power of God, and were such as might be expected in connection with the advent of the Messiah. True indeed to the national obliquity, like real Jews, they required a "sign,"—Nicodemus and his friends placed that stumbling-block before them, instead of looking only to the "more sure word of prophecy:" but they did not, with their present impressions, by their representative, deny that Christ's great works met the case,—they did not deny that these works constituted an adequate SIGN; they admitted that they proved, at least, that "God was with him." These counsellors did not yet hold the truth of God's presence in Christ in the high and just sense, —the sense of which Christ himself spoke when he said, "He that sent me is with me,"—the sense in which Nathanael, and the Baptist, and others, held it also. But, generally, they admitted, that as God showed favour to Abraham, to Joshua, and others, so the miracles wrought by Jesus declared that he showed favour to him likewise; that as he was with Moses, to prosper and make him successful in his mission, according to Moses' pleading, "If thy presence go not with me, carry

us not up hence,"—so he was with Jesus. On such grounds Nicodemus was convinced that he was a messenger come from God ;—therefore, that the word which he spake, the doctrine which he delivered, was to be received as divine. To the works which he did, Christ often appealed. They constituted a greater witness for him than the testimony of John the Baptist, great though that was. When, therefore, Nicodemus made this acknowledgment, an important point certainly was gained. His confession, in one sense, was a great one : he believed that Christ was from God ; that God was with him, was on his side ; that the truth which he taught was divine ; and that the teacher was a man to whom homage and reverence were, in some important form, due.

How little farther does the vast amount of what is called "Christian profession" go ! May not this be taken as the measure, generally, of what passes current for Christianity, with or without the sincerity and uprightness of Nicodemus? But how far short does it fall of what must actually be attained, if our souls are to escape and live for ever ! Nicodemus had yet to learn that Christ was not only from God, but that he was God himself,—not only a teacher of the law, but the Lawgiver. He had yet to be taught his own need of him, in all the glory of his proper character. He had yet to be made to "know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death." Verily, if our religion goes not beyond that of this Pharisee, at the stage which he had now reached, it will little avail us; still we require to be taught which be the first principles of the oracles of God; for our place has not then been taken

even on the lowest form of the school of Christ's true disciples.

III. THE DIRECT REPLY OF CHRIST: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

How does this meet the address of Nicodemus? in what sense is it a reply to him? This question may be answered in various ways.

"Your satisfaction," we may suppose Jesus to say, "with the miracles; your assent to my doctrine, proved to be of God by the miracles, is not enough. If that confession is supposed by you to give you ground of hope before God, you are under a grand mistake. No right hope can rest upon such a foundation."

Or it may be supposed that Christ, knowing the desire of Nicodemus to be instructed as to the kingdom of God, anticipated him, and communicated the knowledge before it was asked. What he did desire to know must be attended to. His expectations were carnal, like those of all the Jews. He looked for a temporal kingdom, to be immediately instituted, and for the restoration of all the glory, and of all the SIGNS of precaptivity times. With his countrymen, he believed in the approach and in the speedy arrival of such times; and he sought, therefore, to know from Christ whether this kingdom was really at hand, whether Jesus himself was connected with its institution and manifestation, and in what relation he was to stand to it. We have no reason to think that more

than this was included in the object of the application of this member of the Sanhedrim; to such a state of mind, on his part, Christ's answer was addressed.

The purpose contemplated by Christ in his answer, is seen when we examine the terms of his reply. It clearly was to make an end of all the carnal expectations of his visitor; for he first describes to him a spiritual change through which all must pass, and then asserts the absolute necessity of a man experiencing that change if he is to *see*,—that is, if he is to be of, the kingdom of God.

1. *He describes a spiritual change through which all must pass.*

They must be "born again,"—they must be "born from above." It is the truth with which we have met in the first chapter of this Gospel. The change is there described as being "born of God," "born of the Spirit;" and elsewhere, being "begotten again to a lively hope,"—being "washed with the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

The change so described is evidently placed in contrast with a state that preceded it; it is being "born AGAIN."

It is contrasted with our *natural birth*, in which we are born in sin, in corruption, and under the wrath which has been revealed from heaven against all manner of transgression, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. The change describes a "new creature," a "new man." The understanding receives new light; the will, new inclinations; the heart, new objects of affection. The change supposes a "new heart" and a "new spirit." It is life from God,—the life of God com-

municated to the dead soul! It is not mere reformation; not the renovation of that which was dilapidated; not the repairing of the old house, and making it as good as new; but it is a reconstruction of the house upon a new foundation,—the house itself being built anew, from that foundation to the copestone. The meaning of this, however, is not that the renewed man is then a different being,—different as to his identity. The house in which the leprosy had become a fretting plague, when taken down every stone of it, and built again in due time, was not a different house from that which it had previously been. The materials were still the same,—the design and form were the same even to the most minute details; and, in the case of the new birth, the "spirit, and soul, and body," are the same in personal identity, but they are "made new." It is a new man; and for that new man there is a new destiny. Without this change there can be no entrance into the kingdom of God, no ability to obey, and no inclination to obey, according to the holy will of God; no planting which can possibly secure vitality or progress, which can issue in fruitfulness or in final perfection. But being made partakers of a divine nature, we are born again; the dead have then been made alive; they live unto God; they are of his kingdom!

Or, the change announced is contrasted with a condition of mere *outward privileges*. Such a condition was the boast of the Jews, and the spirit of that boast expressed itself in the profession, "We have Abraham for our father," meaning that in him all the promises belonged to them; or, "We be Moses' disciples," meaning that to

them belonged exclusively the oracles and the ordinances. On this ground they reared a fallacious and ruinous hope; for the new birth was not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God! Addressing this Pharisee, Christ stated this great doctrine to overthrow his vain imaginations,—such imaginations as that circumcision, and other outward distinctive conditions of the house of Israel, constituted qualifications for the kingdom of God, or were the evidence that those qualifications were possessed. This was his object; and, in depreciating all Jewish legal righteousness, he touched the sore of Nicodemus, and that not only as earthliness of views constitutes the fatal mistake of every natural man in his foolish hopes of heaven, but as Nicodemus was a Jew, and a Pharisee. Christ's object was to convince him of sin now, by destroying the false hope in which he trusted. He taught him that, though a Jew and a Pharisee, he was a stranger and an alien; that he had no interest in the kingdom of God, and no meetness for it. As he touched the sore of the rich young ruler, when he said, "Yet lackest thou one thing, go sell all that thou hast, and come, follow me," so here he did the same to Nicodemus, when he proclaimed, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

2. *He asserts the absolute necessity of undergoing the change described, if any one is to see that kingdom.*

You ask, What kingdom? God's kingdom is over all, both over the natural and over the moral world. Christ speaks not of the former here. His kingdom, in the latter

sense, is to be viewed with regard to man's condition before sin entered, and after sin entered; with regard to the first covenant, or man's condition under the law, and with regard to the second covenant, or man's condition under grace. Christ spake of the latter—of the condition under the kingdom of grace; and he spake of that kingdom, not only as including all spiritual good here, but also the glory which is to be revealed, and which forms the only proper conclusion to the previous reign of grace. This kingdom has a king, has subjects, has laws, has privileges; and it has enemies too, who are not merely not of it, but who are its actual and deadly opponents. That to which Christ especially alluded, in speaking of the kingdom to Nicodemus, was the blessedness which particularly belongs to it, the excellent glory by which it is distinguished,—a glory not outward and corporeal, "not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

To "SEE" this kingdom implies the possession of spiritual life, spiritual sight, spiritual sense: with the bodily eyes men do not behold it. To "see," in the sense of the text, implies, particularly, that we are partakers of all the good of the kingdom,—that we are "joint-heirs with Christ" in the enjoyment of all. Thus, to "see life," as in verse 36, is to *have* life; to *see* death, is to experience death; to *see* good or evil, is to enjoy the one or to suffer the other; and to "see the kingdom of God" is to enter into it (ver. 5); is to TASTE as well as see; is to be qualified to rejoice in its blessings as well as to possess them.

This cannot belong to us unless we are "born again."

We can neither be of the kingdom of grace now, nor of the kingdom of glory hereafter, if that change be wanting. It is forbidden in the nature of things. The kingdom is a spiritual one; but we are carnal, until the great change is effected. It is by inheritance, but we are not "sons" until then,—then only have we power given to us "to be called the sons of God."

"Verily, verily," said Christ; in other words, "Thus saith the Lord!" The solemn truth is ever so! It was emphatic to Nicodemus,—a Jew,—a Pharisee,—trusting to his profession; it is emphatic to *us*,—Christians,—baptized,—members of the church,—trusting to that. Let us not be deceived. Only if we "sow to the Spirit shall we reap life everlasting." The invitation to every one of us is to enter in by the *door*. Christ is the door, and to him the porter openeth,—the Holy Ghost, his ever-blessed agent in the great work of bringing sinners into his kingdom. Why, then, should we stand without? or why should we hope to ascend to heaven in any way but that which the only wise and righteous God himself has ordained?

THE REASONING WITH NICODEMUS.

"Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."—John iii. 4–8.

We have seen how Christ's words, spoken to Nicodemus, were a suitable reply to his inquiry. Acknowledging him to be a teacher come from God, the Jewish rabbi desired to be instructed concerning the "kingdom" which he believed was about to appear; and to meet that desire, he received the only answer which truth could give,—an answer which conveyed instruction of a nature that was calculated, as it clearly was intended, to overturn the carnal and vain pre-conceptions of himself and others on a question in the highest degree momentous.

In declaring to him that "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," Jesus described a spiritual saving change, which, if a man did not experience, he had no part in the kingdom, but remained

destitute of the qualification which is essential to a place therein. Jesus, undoubtedly, spoke of a change which does not come by our first or natural birth, and which does not consist in a condition of outward privilege however high. His language was plain, tender, earnest, emphatic; for his aim evidently was at once, and without circumlocution, to extinguish every hope which this Pharisee founded on his own earthly convictions and carnal expectations.

We have in the verses now read what may be called a defence, on the part of the Saviour, of the doctrine delivered to Nicodemus. That which gave occasion to it was the objection on the part of the latter, which is contained in the 4th verse,—an objection by which his misapprehension, and the carnal impressions which he entertained of that "kingdom of heaven" which was looked for by him, were made manifest. The objection rests on the physical impossibility, that a man when he is old should be born again,—that he should then experience natural birth a second time. He speaks of himself, and alludes to his own case: how could such a thing occur to him? Moreover, he objects, not only that as being an old man a new birth was physically impossible, but also that, as filling such a place as he did, clothed with ecclesiastical authority, and endowed with the learning and other qualifications which his office demanded, it was unsuitable to speak to him of any such change as the language of the Saviour, even if meant to be figurative, implied.

By so objecting, Nicodemus showed his entire ignorance

of the true nature of the kingdom of God long promised, and now about to appear. He also manifested want of due respect for Christ, whom he acknowledged to be a teacher come from God, when he could for one moment suppose that he had spoken of any thing so absurd as that a man should, in its literal signification, "enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born." The objection, however, gave occasion for the defence; and that defence we have now to consider.

It includes, I. *A re-assertion of the previous doctrine, with some change in the form of the expression;* II. *An argument in support of the truth that a man must be born again;* and, III. *An exhortation to Nicodemus to put away his carnal views, with some further exposition of that which he had already taught him.*

I. A RE-ASSERTION OF THE PREVIOUS DOCTRINE, WITH SOME CHANGE IN THE FORM OF THE EXPRESSION: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of *water*, and of *the Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."—(Ver. 5.)

Here we have an expansion of the previous statement. Then it was simply "born again;" now it is "born of water,"—"born of the Spirit." Then no more than a great change generally was indicated; now a change of condition, and a change of character, respectively, seem to be pointed at, whilst this announcement is made solemn and emphatic, as in the previous instance,—the expression equivalent to "Thus saith the Lord," as it was then, being twice repeated.

1. *We must be born "of water."* This describes a change of condition,—a change from guilt and condemnation, to a condition of righteousness and acceptance,—the change which the soul experiences when it is made a partaker of Christ's work accomplished in its behalf. This exposition assumes that the term "water" emblematically represents Christ's obedience as the substitute of those who are saved by him, and that to be "born" emblematically represents the application of that obedience for salvation. So it is said by the prophet Ezekiel, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you;"—words which describe the blessed change involved in sin removed, and the cause of God's displeasure destroyed; the blessed change involved in the benefits of the great atonement being imparted, and the judicial acquittal consequent thereon being enjoyed. As the waters of the deluge hid from God's eye the evil of the old world,—washed the old world clean, removed every stain of its previous defilement,—so Christ's finished work applied, Christ's righteousness imputed, covers our transgression, hides our sin, buries it in the depth of the sea, puts it out of sight as that is put out of sight over which the ocean rolls.

The sacrament of baptism, in one view of it, is the new testament emblem representing this gracious change of condition. That ordinance is, however, but an emblem. The absurdity of holding that, in itself, the rite of baptism with water can have any efficacy to alter our condi-

tion judicially before God, is so great as to be unworthy of serious refutation. The meritorious cause of such a change is Christ's work only, and baptism is nothing more than the symbol which represents that work and its application to the soul, and is not even the instrumental cause of the happy change, except in as far as the truth expressed symbolically by it, is apprehended intelligently by the mind, and applied savingly by the Holy Ghost. If salvation were by baptism, why did Simon Magus perish? If baptism be essential to salvation, how was the penitent thief saved?

We are "*born* of water," inasmuch as when, "justified freely by grace through the redemption which is in Christ," and by faith in his name, we enter upon a new life. Then we are no longer under condemnation. Moreover, then we become temples of the Holy Ghost; for, consistently with the glory of God in his moral government, the Spirit may then come and dwell in us. The living principle of right obedience to the divine law is accordingly implanted, and our progress "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," is secured. Our hearts are given to God, for he hath redeemed us by his own blood, and has laid us under everlasting obligations to love and serve him. Deeply sensible of this, we become living sacrifices, holy and acceptable.

2. *We must be born "of the Spirit."* This describes the change of character, as distinguished from the change of condition, implied in being born "again." It is the change which the soul experiences when it is savingly converted, and a change which is inseparably connected

with the other. As the one constitutes Christ's work *for* the soul made effectual, the other constitutes his work *in* the soul made effectual. So Ezekiel, when, in the passage already quoted, he says, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean," at the same time adds, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." The New Testament is full of the same doctrine, teaching that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and of death;" that we are "transformed into the same image" as Christ's, "from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord;" that of his "mercy we are saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost;" and that we are "chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth."

In the work of which we thus speak, the Spirit gives effect to the purpose of the Father, and to the vicarious obedience of the Son. In doing this he quickens the soul,—exhibits to it the word of testimony,—works faith, by which the word is forthwith received,—and, following on all this, awakens new feelings, implants new principles, imparts new hopes, new fears, new desires, and new joys. The word is the "living seed;" the quickened soul is the soil prepared by the great Husbandman for its reception; faith is the power residing in the quickened soul, which appropriates and incorporates the "living

seed," so that fruit unto holiness is brought forth. This change of character may be small in its beginnings,—small as the grain of mustard, but the man who is the subject of it is born of the Spirit; and to him, though it may be in the rudiments only, is given "grace for grace,"—grace corresponding to that which distinguishes Him of whom he is begotten,—grace that will suffice for every emergency here, and have for its end everlasting life. It is the origin which has "progress unto perfection" for its completion. With this new life and its growth will come the gradual decay of all unholy principles, until they are wholly destroyed. A change of character it is, as distinguished from a change of condition,—a change of character in the inward man first, but extending necessarily to the outward conduct in every department of duty. The earth, once cleansed by the deluge, abides another cleansing by fire. When this latter has been accomplished, the "new heavens and the new earth" shall appear. The soul cleansed by application of the blood of atonement, receives cleansing by the Spirit, by which only does it become a meet residence for its Maker. The baptism by "water" cannot be separated from the baptism by "fire." As surely as a man undergoes the one in truth, he will undergo the other. If the merits of Christ are, in sovereign grace, imputed, the effectual call of the Spirit will also be heard and obeyed; or if any man be born of the Spirit, he is so born as having been accepted in Christ. Salvation is of the "foreknowledge of God the Father," of "sanctification by the Spirit," and of "obedience and sprinkling by the blood of Christ."

We must be "born of water,"—not by "deeds of the law." What was it, then, to Nicodemus that he was a disciple of Moses?

We must be born of the Spirit,—a birth which is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh." What was it, then, to this ruler of the Jews that he was of the children of Abraham?

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The former expression was, "he cannot *see* the kingdom",—he can never be put in possession of the good which is so described,—he can never inherit the portion of the children of God. As the unbelieving Israelites were not permitted to see, as they could not enter, the land of which God had said: "I will give it you," so neither can we be made partakers of the "rest which remains," though a "promise be left us of entering in," if we are not born of "water and of the Spirit." None but the priests entered the holy places of the temple; the king's daughter only is brought into the palace; the citizens only are admitted into the city of our God. How urgent and impressive in declaring this solemn truth was the great Teacher with Nicodemus; and if he was so with him, is he not also equally urgent and impressive with us? Can there possibly be a different rule in our case from that which was announced in his? Can we expect to be of the kingdom of grace now, or of the kingdom of glory hereafter, if we are not changed in condition and in character, as the terms of the address made to him so unequivocally declare? Away with all delusions of

Satan on this point! Let them be resisted by us as we value our souls, as we value the eternity on which we are about to enter! We must be partakers of Christ's atonement, if we are to be of his kingdom; and we must be also partakers of his life through the Spirit; we must enjoy the benefit of his mediatorial obedience, and live under the power of his saving grace; we must be exalted in his righteousness, and beautified with his salvation!

II. AN ARGUMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE NECESSITY THAT A MAN SHOULD BE BORN AGAIN: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."—(Ver. 6.)

1. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*" The term "flesh" here, as in other parts of Scripture, when employed in a similar connection, means our fallen nature,—the "law of sin and death," as opposed to the "law of the Spirit of life,"—that which "lusteth against the Spirit," and is "contrary" unto it. The "flesh" is the seat and source of evil within the soul; and the entire life of man, the evidence of the existence of the polluted fountain. The body is but the instrument through which the inherent corruption acts, and through which it expresses and communicates itself. The natural condition of every man is that of a fatal subjection to a nature of sin, the proper author of which is the Enemy, who was a "liar and a murderer from the beginning." This condition is natural to saints as well as to others. Therefore, although through grace they are made partakers of a new nature in their union to Christ, their own nature is that

of the "flesh," as it is the nature communicated to those who are of them,—that which they transmit to their offspring, as they have themselves inherited it. Of all mankind, without exception, it is true that they are concluded under sin,—that they are the "children of wrath,"—saints being so by birth, "even as others."

This nature can never be any thing else than that which the Scriptures describe it to be. It is incapable of change into its opposite. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." "Born as a wild ass's colt, man cannot be wise." "The imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are evil, and that continually." The change which the Scriptures describe as passing on them who are saved, is not the reformation and improvement of their fallen nature; it is not sewing new raiment on the old garment, or putting new wine into old bottles; it is not adorning what is dead, or imparting to it the appearance of life; it is not such alterations as may be ascribed, after they have been carried to their utmost limits, to the natural mind and conscience enlightened, or to the affections heated by any unhallowed fire. None of these meet the case of the change needed by us and implied in true salvation. "That which is born of the flesh," treat it as you will, and improve it by whatever successful cultivation you can, "is flesh" still, and never can be any thing else. A new nature, and a new life from God, are essential to the production of the saving change of which the Scriptures uniformly declare the necessity. The other nature must perish utterly. Predominant until the new creation has been wrought in the soul, it is then predominant no

more. It exists, but it does not reign. Grace reigns in its room; and though it ever resists that reign, it cannot overthrow it, but must itself ultimately be for ever overthrown.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and it behoved the ruler of Israel to know and consider a truth which put an end to all his Jewish, carnal hopes. He was thus forcibly taught, if a man were still "in the flesh," "neither circumcision availed any thing, nor uncircumcision." "A new creature," and "the keeping of the commandments of God," from the principle of holiness in the heart, implied in the new creation, could alone exemplify the condition of a true subject of the kingdom. In vain should Nicodemus expect admission under other circumstances; and in vain shall we expect it. But it is to be feared that many fatal mistakes have been extensively prevalent on this head. The word of God is very clear, as it speaks of a truth so momentous; but the carnal mind is unspeakably obtuse to perceive it,—indeed the carnal mind cannot know this, one of the greatest of the things of the Spirit, because it can only be spiritually discerned. The attempts to apprehend this mystery, which the carnal of every age have made, have exhibited the most melancholy examples of groping in the dark,—of such hopeless wanderings as can have no issue but perdition. Unless it were true that Satan holds men's spirits even now in "chains of darkness," it would be impossible to understand how such a profanity, as the dogma of regeneration by application of a little water, could either be taught or believed. What a sorceress

must the "mother of harlots" be, and how similar must other churches who adopt her views be, when they have so extensively beguiled unstable souls into a persuasion so dishonouring to truth and to the God of truth! If Nicodemus sinned when for one moment he conceived that Christ spoke of any thing so absurd as that a man, when he is old, must "enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born," how is their sin to be estimated who teach that the application of water by the hands of a sinful man, who denominates himself priest (itself unwarrantable), and can trace what he calls his apostolic succession (itself a mere figment), is all that is meant by being "born again"?

No, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and whatever outward changes it may experience from whatever cause, and notwithstanding whatever manipulations of men, or, if it were possible, even of angels, it is of its father the devil, and must die the death!

2. "*That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" We have spoken of what is to be understood by the expression, "born again." It is a change both of condition and character. The "righteousness of God" is made ours; the nature of God is made ours, and dwells within us. We receive the "Spirit of adoption," and we are no longer under the power of the "spirit of bondage." That wherein we were once held is now dead, that we may serve in "newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

To be born of the Spirit is to have a new life and a new nature,—a new life not of "the flesh," not in any sense from the old nature. Of the Spirit, it is itself

"spirit." The change does not consist in some faculties of our original nature being set against others, so creating conflicts within ourselves, such as even the most wicked men sometimes know, and which are not without their use, though they are not the result of salvation. It is not this; but the change consists in all the faculties of the soul being pervaded and possessed by a divine influence directly from God, as was that which he at first communicated when he made man, in his own image, a living soul. The understanding has life imparted to it, and a power of discernment which it never before had, for spiritual things are now received in a spiritual sense; the will is renewed, and inclined towards the things which the understanding now spiritually discerns; the affections are sanctified,—a new vigour is infused into them, new objects are delighted in, and new ends are sought. As the soul, in all its faculties, is by natural birth the seat of corruption, so now is it by the new birth, in all its faculties, made the seat of grace. Sin, though it still exists, has no longer dominion, for grace reigns. Conflict necessarily ensues; but it is not, as we have said, the conflict of some of the faculties with others,—as of the conscience with the will and affections,—but the conflict of the new with the old nature in every faculty. Thus, effectually we cease to be the servants of sin, for we have become the servants of another master,—we have chosen the opposite of sin, and we love the opposite, even that which is spiritual and heavenly. The image of God begins to reappear. The day breaks after a long night of darkness. The "blade" bursts through the bare

field, which had been broken up, and pressed into dust, as if to extirpate life and the hope of life. Spiritual blessings are sought after. The soul thirsts for God, as the parched ground thirsts for the former and the latter rains. Then do the fruits of the Spirit appear,—not the "blade" only, but the "ear" also, and by and by "the full corn in the ear," in anticipation of, and in preparation for the great harvest, when all shall be gathered into the garner.

There can be no entrance into the kingdom of God but by such a change. Our first creation by God is not the ground of our admission, for that we have destroyed,—"flesh and blood," in that view of it, cannot inherit the kingdom; being born only of "blood," and of the "will of the flesh," we are "flesh,"—we are nothing else, and so are unfit for the kingdom. There is an absolute necessity, therefore, for the change. According to God's purpose, on the ground of Christ's merits, under the grace and power of the Spirit, we "must be born again." And the new condition is not to be confounded with the old. They are different in the nature of things. Whatever Nicodemus was by birth, by office, by ecclesiastical standing, as circumcised, or as touching the law blameless, not being "born again" in the sense in which the Saviour spoke of it, he was not of the kingdom, for he was still in the "flesh," and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Between the one condition and the other there is an eternal distinction, for the one is of heaven and the other of earth and hell. In vain, therefore, do they who have no spiritual excellence, no excellence at all but that

which springs from corruption,—they who can claim no other origin for any good which they do, all whose works are dead works,—in vain do they expect to see the glory which is to be revealed.

III. An exhortation to Nicodemus to put away his carnal views, and some further exposition of the great truth which Christ had taught him: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."—(Ver. 7, 8.)

The language of the 7th verse reveals Christ's opinion of the Jewish ruler. Whatever Nicodemus might be by office, by personal acquirements, or by nature, he was not born again; he was yet destitute of the great change which is described by that expression, "Ye must be born again," —that is Nicodemus himself, and those in whose name he had come on his present mission, must. This was the truth, as regarded his spiritual condition; and the faithful and true witness, Jesus, testified it without reserve. The testimony had a great public object, and was intended for all who, in a similar spirit with that of the Sanhedrim inquirers, were waiting for the kingdom of God. The requisite qualification for that kingdom, he declared, was not outward adherence, under any circumstances of outward privilege, to the Messiah, and to his supposed cause, but saving and spiritual conversion, remission of sin, and a heart yielded submissively to God and to his holy law.

'Marvel not at this. Think not that such doctrine is absurd or unreasonable; look not on it as a vain imagination, or an unintelligible dogma. Receive it rather as a great practical truth. Bring forth fruit, therefore, meet for repentance, and begin not to say that ye have Abraham for your father. Put not your trust in the fact, that you are a Jew—a Pharisee. "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."'

In the 8th verse Nicodemus receives farther instruction in the great mystery, to the knowledge of which he had been introduced,—his teacher employing an emblem the force of which the ruler's knowledge of the Scriptures must have qualified him to appreciate.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth—so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The wind is under no human control, but is entirely free. Now there is the dead calm, and then the gentle breeze which breaks the stillness, unexpectedly rustling the leaves on every tree. Now it is calm again: anon the grateful breathing of the air changes into a gale, and the forest bends under its mighty influence: sometimes the effect is long continued—sometimes short;—and man can neither produce, nor modify, nor guide, nor subdue the element which causes all. So are the operations of the Spirit; God as sovereign appoints them. Man does not call them forth; human control cannot extend to them; they are not in any measure or

in any sense of man ; but only of the will, and under the guidance of the Most High.

"Thou *hearest* the sound thereof." The wind declares its presence by the sound which it makes. The Lord God uttereth his voice. Though you see not, you *hear*. So are the operations of the Spirit ; they come in connection with the declaration of the word. On the day of Pentecost, when gracious operations were vouchsafed, they were accompanied with the appropriate emblem : "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind;" the word was preached, and souls were savingly converted. When the Spirit works, it is by the word. The word which God hath spoken is the Spirit's instrument, and he employs no other word,—it is the word of God, and not the word of man,—man being honoured when by him, as the trumpet through which God's voice passes, it is made audible to his fellow-men. Under the *sound* of the prophet's prophesying, the Spirit came to the dry bones in the valley of vision, and life entered into them. It is well that we should hear that sound. There are those who have ears to hear, and hear not. The "sheep" *hear* the shepherd's "voice;" others do not.

It is well that we should be able to distinguish that voice from every other. Blessed are they who *know* the joyful sound. That sound is never uncertain ; the sheep know it, and discern the voice of the stranger, diverse as it is from the voice of the shepherd; they will not follow, —they flee from the stranger. The shepherd they do follow, for they know his *voice*.

"Thou canst not tell whence it cometh." Nicodemus had asked, "How can a man be born again?" The thing is unaccountable and inexplicable; such was the spirit of the objection. Equally unaccountable and inexplicable, Christ replies, is another thing, which excites no surprise. By the word you are, indeed, born again; by that sound, —by that sound, in the hand of Him whose agency changes the soul,—but the origin of his power, its source and first cause, and its manifestation in communicating spiritual life, is a mystery. Neither can you tell whence the natural wind cometh, and that is another mystery. Its origin, its first cause, issuing in such manifestations as produce effects palpable to our senses, is a mystery. Why marvel at the one, and not at the other? Would you have the mystery in both cases unveiled?—know then, that "God bringeth the wind out of his treasures." "Thou knowest not the way of the wind, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." What work of God can any man understand and explain? Who knoweth the mind of the Lord? Who can tell how life is first communicated to the unorganised matter which forms the rudiments of man's physical nature? Who, either, can tell how divine life is communicated to the soul? Nay, who can unravel the mystery of life imparted under any circumstances,—imparted in various degrees, and with various effects, according to the purpose of a sovereign will, which giveth not account of its matters?

"Thou canst not tell whence it cometh," neither canst thou tell "whither it goeth." As the origin of the Spirit's

saving operations is in God,—is of his sovereign purpose, of his will, and of his goodness,—so are their progress and issues. We know not whither they go. "Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be." We know not into what trials and temptations we may come, led of the Spirit; nor unto what spiritual enjoyment we shall arise,—to what blessedness now, or to what heights of glory hereafter. The future is hid from us. The glory of the kingdom, the things which God has in store for them who love him, are blessings which eye hath not seen, and which ear has not heard.

By such doctrine did Christ seek to deliver the soul of Nicodemus from its vain superstitions. With such doctrine does he seek to impress us, for our salvation. Let us pray to be made partakers of the great change which the Lord the Spirit works, and thus at length may we sit down in the kingdom with all who are there—the kingdom which shall never end. What shall it profit us to be of the kingdom on earth, not having entered by the door, the gate of righteousness, through which alone there was access even for Christ himself, but having climbed up some other way,—what shall this profit us, if we have not the imparted grace through which the kingdom of God shall be within us; and if we are not thus in possession of that eternal life which alone is appropriate to an everlasting reign of unspeakable glory?

JESUS CHARGES NICODEMUS WITH HIS SIN.

"Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"—John iii. 9–12.

"How can these things be?" To what things did Nicodemus refer? To the things of which the Saviour had just spoken. Nicodemus, no doubt, had his own impressions of the meaning of being "born again;" but they were entirely carnal. Christ had spoken of a "birth" by "water" and by "the Spirit;" of a great change both in the spiritual condition and in the spiritual character of a man,—a change implying a renunciation of one's own righteousness, and the accepting of that which has been provided for sinners of the human race; implying, also, spiritual renovation, with an absolute dependence for all on grace, and on divine power,—a power so sovereign that it is like the wind which bloweth where it listeth, whose sound we hear, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. Nicodemus had heard and was astonished. He was not only under

the power of surprise, but likewise in a state of unbelief and of corrupt resistance to the truth. That he was so, we are warranted to conclude from this question which he addressed to the Saviour, in reply to the solemn instruction which he had communicated: "How can these things be?"—'How can any thing so unheard of, any thing so incredible and unintelligible in itself, any thing so opposed to our law, be true? Or, how can I be expected to receive doctrine of a nature so incomprehensible?'

The Saviour's reply to this appeal we have in the verses immediately following that in which the appeal occurs, down to the 21st verse inclusive; and it conveys some reproof, but consists chiefly of important information, communicated to the Jewish ruler for "his instruction in righteousness."

In the verses before us, he is,—I. *Reproved for his ignorance;* II. *He is taught the evil involved in this ignorance;* and, III. *He is warned of the danger to which it exposes him.*

I. NICODEMUS IS REPROVED FOR HIS IGNORANCE: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"—(Ver. 10.)

How came it, Christ demanded, as if in surprise at a thing so inconsistent, that he, a "master of Israel," knew not the things of which he had now heard, or how was it that such ignorance existed in his case? Occupying Moses' seat,—perhaps the head of the Sanhedrim,—not only a judge of causes, but an expounder of the law

by profession, speaking daily with his fellow-sinners on the great subject of their eternal salvation, how could it be that he was without the knowledge of these things? What sin and guilt did it involve!

1. He *might* have known the truth of which Christ had now spoken: it was no novel doctrine, but doctrine taught everywhere in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The Psalmist prays, "Create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me;"—a prayer for that very grace of life of which Nicodemus had just heard. Ezekiel exhorts the people of Israel in these terms, "Make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" This prophet also declares the covenant-promise which meets the requirement of his exhortation,—a promise that must have its fulfilment in the experience of all who are saved: "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." Moses speaks of the same promise, when he says, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." And in consistency with such promises, David plainly teaches, that the man who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, who shall stand in his holy place, is he who hath *clean hands* and a *pure heart*, that he alone shall receive blessings from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Christ had spoken no new truth,—nothing but what his visitor might have understood. The ignorance of the "master of Israel" was inexcusable. The wonder which he expressed, the ques-

tion which he put, "How can these things be?" were unworthy of his position of opportunity and of privilege, and demanded, as they received, reproof,—reproof gently conveyed, indeed, but intended to come home to the conscience and to the heart.

2. He *ought* to have known this truth. By office he was a "guide of the blind,—a light to them who were in darkness." He lived under an abiding conviction, that the "people who knew not the law were accursed,"—such was the prevailing sentiment of the Sanhedrim, one which they were not slow on occasions to utter; and Nicodemus being of their number, we must conclude that this was the conviction of his mind as it was of theirs. If, however, he was ignorant of the truth to which he had listened from the lips of Jesus, he was a "blind leader" of those who were "blind,"—one who neither himself had entered the kingdom of heaven, nor who permitted others to do it,—a teacher of the law, who understood neither what he said, nor whereof he affirmed, —a teacher, in short, to whose charge the people, if accursed, might lay their calamity, as, through his ignorance and incapacity, they were exposed to it. If such a change as the language, in all the instances we have quoted, and in other passages of similar import, implied, was required that man might be saved,—if such a change was essential and indispensable that sinners might escape the wrath of God, and be made partakers of the qualifications necessary for serving and enjoying him, and if that change was clearly revealed by the Scriptures, why was it that Nicodemus was

a stranger to it? Why was it the case that one on whom rested the heavy responsibility involved in the office with which he was invested, should never have seriously thought either of the nature or necessity of a salvation so vital? Why should God have written to him the great things of his law, and they be counted as a strange thing? Taking the view of his case which his ignorance certainly warrants and justifies, it seems beyond doubt that this Jewish teacher had hitherto been unfaithful and unprofitable. The question with which he had replied to the Saviour's doctrine, and by which he expressed his objection, revealed this melancholy, and, to him, most alarming fact. We must judge of the words of Jesus, therefore, with this view of his position before us. Those words were not of a character intended to hide or to exonerate the delinquency of Nicodemus, but rather to set his sin before him, that his mind might truly apprehend it. Blood-guiltiness as to the souls of our fellow-creatures is, of all offences of which we can be guilty, the most overwhelming. He to whom such guilt is imputed, if mercy be extended to him, and his sin forgiven, must necessarily be brought into depths of humiliation. And, in the case before us, the great Teacher evidently contemplated that result.

It is the Saviour's way, in the communication of grace by the Spirit, first to convince the soul of sin,—first to strip us of our own righteousness and strength, to show us our nakedness and nothingness, to fill us with godly sorrow, and then to lead us to himself for the remedy which every part of our calamity requires. In this order we are

made a "willing people." Thus the soul is made a partaker of the great change essential to its progress towards meetness for God; and the divine nature, the power of a new life, is communicated. The rule is uniform, whatever modifications may, in some circumstances, occur. Its employment in the instance of Nicodemus is manifest, as well as in every other, as we shall find in our examination of this Gospel, to whom the Saviour addressed himself, during his ministry on earth, with a view to their eternal salvation. Christ spoke to convince Nicodemus of sin,—of his own special sin,—of the guilt which, as an unworthy "master of Israel," he had contracted. His sin had its root, and this disciple was made to examine that root, and to decide on its character. To inherent corruption and unbelief he was taught to ascribe the transgression which he practised; and that he might learn what he was taught, his transgression was powerfully pressed upon his conscience: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?"

If no sin can be compared with the sin of unfaithfulness to souls, whether it arise from ignorance, from neglect, or from positive hatred of the truth, so no sin can occasion such "godly sorrow," when conviction unto salvation has visited the soul on which it rests. A minister may, indeed, live and die quietly under a world's weight of guilt arising from such sin,—a thing which occurs so frequently, that one trembles to contemplate a future filled with such terror,—filled with such shame and everlasting contempt to so many; but when Christ now

apprehends by his Spirit a man thus laden with iniquity, that he may cause him to know himself, what humiliation can be like that which overtakes him? A humiliation as the very shadow of death it must be. The whole enormity may not be permitted to be seen at once,—the entire darkness may not immediately ensue, but in due time it must take possession of the rightly convinced soul; when the clearest view of Christ's glorious work,—of the fulness of the satisfaction given by him to divine justice,—of the preciousness of his blood,—of the freeness and all-sufficiency of his grace and mercy, will be required to give relief to the oppressed conscience and the smitten heart. We are justified in believing that the humiliation of Nicodemus was saving, and, in due time, thorough. 'What am I indeed,' we may suppose him to exclaim, 'that I should be a master in Israel, a ruler of the people, and be ignorant at the same time of that which this teacher come from God has spoken in my ears! Woe is me, for I am undone, a man of unclean lips, and dwelling among a people of unclean lips,—a people unclean by my fault!' How full of grace to him, in such circumstances, the additional information of the way of salvation which was communicated, and the bright display of the glory of the Saviour's person which he proceeded to give! If made to feel himself in the deep pit and in the miry clay, he was also made to experience that his feet were being set upon the Rock, and all his goings established.

He can be no "master of Israel" who is ignorant of "these things." The name, the external office, or emblems of that office, he may have; but no more. Occa-

sion of deep sadness it is, that whereas this truth of the necessity of a vital change,—both as to the acceptance of our persons with God, and as to a real spiritual new creation of the soul unto him,—ought to be the universal truth proclaimed by every professed "master of Israel," sometimes it is never heard from their lips; at other times it is spoken of because the fact of its doctrinal existence, and of its place in the scriptural system, cannot be denied; and most frequently it is misrepresented, perverted, or burlesqued, whilst, to an enormous extent, it is made the foundation of a senseless and deadly superstition. Never do we deal faithfully with men's souls but when this doctrine, stated in conformity to the divine oracles, forms the substance of all our preaching,—but when it is made the warp on which is woven the whole testimony, regarding Christian belief and Christian practice in every department, giving unity, strength, beauty, and practical value to the whole. Our relation to God through Adam (I mean our natural condition) is one involving spiritual and eternal death. Our relation to God through his Son, the "last man,"—involving a recurrence to the original source of that eternal life of which Adam's transgression robbed us—such recurrence, according to God's eternal purpose, by faith in the accomplished redemption, under the application and power of the Spirit, implying peace with God, and the possession of his own nature,—this relation is essential to any good hope. As so endowed only can we be pleasing, or do what is pleasing to him. Then only can we be in circumstances to grow in meetness for the heavenly inheritance, for then only are we of the plants which our

heavenly Father hath planted. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," whatever its appearance may be to any created eye; "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,"—that only is so. But if this great truth be concealed,—if it be not made prominent by all "masters of Israel,"—if it be not proclaimed according to the analogy of faith,—if it be not expressed or clearly understood in conjunction with every scriptural exposition of the things of God,—if it be not *in* every thing, and a part *of* every thing which we speak for Christ,—how many souls will be required at our hands! How guilty shall we be of the sin of healing the hurt of men's souls slightly,—of doing the part of the unfaithful physician, who induces the skin to grow over the deadly secret canker, and permits the poison thereof to permeate through all the frame, and to break out in loathsome blotches and boils! How like shall our folly then be to that of him who expects wholesome fruit from the diseased tree, or the sweet savour of health amidst the putridity of the charnel house!

II. NICODEMUS IS WARNED OF THE EVIL INVOLVED IN HIS IGNORANCE: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness."—(Ver. 11.)

Christ here generally declares that the unbelief of Nicodemus and his colleagues (for he includes the latter) arose from perverse obstinacy in resisting the testimony which was borne to truth the most vital and important. The verse now before us is certainly to be ex-

plained with special regard to the immediately preceding context. There, as we have seen, Nicodemus, a professed leader of the blind, is upbraided for his ignorance. Christ would not have upbraided him on that ground, had he been blameless, on the plea that he had never had the opportunity of knowing the things which were now spoken to him. Were it true that this "master of Israel" and his colleagues were justifiable, on any ground, for their carnal expectations with reference to the kingdom of God, he would not have condemned them; particularly, he would not have done it, were they justifiable on the ground that they had never, in any form, had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the truth on a subject so full of interest. Our Lord is not one who reaps where he has not sown, or who takes up that which he laid not down. To Nicodemus and to his colleagues opportunity of knowing had been provided. The "light had shined in darkness." Christ, that "Light," had come unto his own,—again and again he had done so; but the "darkness did not comprehend the light," —his own had "not received him:" of all which his present visitor offered a melancholy example. As expressed in this verse, he and others of a similar character had not received the witness,—the testimony which had been given to them. This guilt rested on them,—this sin was chargeable against them. Although the Lord of the vineyard might expect the fruit of the Spirit when he came to them, he found in all their conceptions of the things of the kingdom, only the grossest carnality; although he might justly expect good grapes on the soil which he had

fenced off, out of which he had gathered the stones, and in which he had planted his choice vine, he found only wild grapes; for when he spake the simple truths which had been in the church from the beginning, he was met with the question, on the part, not of an ordinary man, but of a "master of Israel," "How can these things be?"—a question which manifested the most painful ignorance of the very first principles of the oracles of God. Can we wonder that he spake emphatically,—that he raised his voice of warning,—that again, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," marked the deep emotion of the Saviour's heart, as he dealt with this minister for the salvation of his soul?

We have said that the evil involved in the unbelief of Nicodemus and his friends, was their perverse obstinacy in resisting the testimony so conspicuously borne to the truth. If it be asked, "What testimony?" we answer, The testimony to which the Saviour refers when he says, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Let us endeavour to understand this statement.

"WE speak." Here Christ speaks in his proper character of the "Son of God," "the only-begotten," "the heir of all things." As once it had been said, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness; or again, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us?*" so now the same lips declare, "*We* speak that *we* do know, and testify that *we* have seen." At a period farther advanced in his public ministry, he said, "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the

Father that sent me beareth witness of me." Nicodemus had expressed his belief that Jesus was a "teacher come from God;" but he was not allowed to remain under any defective conviction of the Lord's glory, therefore, in the manner here set forth, the true dignity of Christ's person is revealed to him. He to whom he has come, secretly under shelter of the shades of night, is ONE with the Father and the Spirit; not the "King" only, but the "God of Israel."

Two terms are employed by the Saviour,—"That we do *know*,"—"That we have *seen*."

"That we do *know*." Knowledge of all things referring to the salvation of the world, the erection of the kingdom of God, the gathering into it of all who are to form its subjects, their character, the administration of the kingdom, and every thing else affecting its interests; this knowledge of God's purpose from the beginning, and of its accomplishment unto the end, is ascribed to all the persons of the Godhead without distinction. It is true of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

"That we have *seen*," describes what is properly applicable to Christ himself, and refers to his distinctive relation to the work of salvation and to the kingdom of God,—to his subordinate place in the economy of redemption, as endowed by communications from the Source of all knowledge, and as so qualified to teach all truth. In these words, therefore, he speaks to Nicodemus of his derived glory as the "Son of man;" by the form of expression employed alluding to his relation to God as the Mediator, the man of his right hand,—in which

capacity he testifies what he has seen and heard. Elsewhere, the same truth being in his mind, he says, "The Son can do nothing of himself but what he *seeth* the Father do."

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." It must be clear that the testimony spoken of is the whole record of Scripture,—all which from the beginning had been uttered and testified in the name of God. Holy men of old, prophets and others, had been the outward agents; but the Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, had guided them to speak, and had made them bold and faithful to testify, even unto blood, the things given them. When the fulness of time arrived, the "Son," in his own person, appeared upon earth, to fulfil, in that form, a mission similar to that which those his servants had, in his name, fulfilled before him. The things "known" of God, and "seen" by him (communicated to him), as the "Counsellor" of the Father, were made known to the church of the Old Testament after the manner ordained,—a manner glorious in its character, although inferior in glory to the manner in which they were to be made known through the dispensation which he himself was about to introduce. This he presses on the attention of his present hearer, for his conviction. The history of the past put his responsibility beyond question. The truth necessary to salvation had not been concealed, and the grace necessary to apply it had not been denied: God himself had spoken: every word possessed his authority and his wisdom,—on which ground the charge against

Nicodemus and his colleagues, and others of their countrymen blinded in like manner with them, rested.

Their sin was described in these words: "And ye receive not our witness." The witness of the Godhead,—of the Holy Ghost,—of all whom he had qualified, commissioned, and separated unto the work of witness-bearing,—of John the Baptist latterly, who, in the spirit of Elijah, had for three years and a half, then about to expire, revived the ancient testimony, the burden of it being a call to earnestness in seeking the "new birth,"—all this they had resisted, and the "witness of truth" they still refused to receive. Now he himself stood in the midst of those whom he honoured when he called them "his own." Towards him their course hitherto was of the same character as it had been towards his predecessors. If persisted in, who could estimate the amount of guilt that should be incurred, the extent of condemnation and misery which must follow? Will Nicodemus continue to form one of the "gainsaying and disobedient" people to whom the Son of God was all the day long stretching forth his hands? will he listen to this appeal in vain?

Are *we* free of the sin which Jesus thus denounced against the Jews? Our privileges are more and greater than theirs. To us is given a clearer revelation. Christ has spoken and testified to us, not only by the law and the prophets, but by apostles, evangelists, pastors, teachers. He has come very near to us, in the use of great plainness of speech,—the veil being no longer on the face of Moses. But who has believed his report? Do we "mar-

vel" when it is said to us, "Ye must be born again?" Do we ask, "How can these things be?" Or do we content ourselves with carnal impressions of that word of the Saviour,—impressions most dishonouring to the God of truth and of righteousness, whilst they are fatal to the soul,—as if it were possible that our Father in heaven could give his children a "*stone*" for "bread," or a "scorpion" for a "fish"? "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Yes; and a most solemn consideration it is, that eternal truth is made known,—that, in the providence of Him who ruleth over all, we who are here present have had extended to us the unspeakable blessing of that testimony. If, then, we receive the testimony of men, as to the things of men, the testimony of God is greater, for it speaks of his things. But have we received it? or if any say we have, wherein does the fact appear? what evidence do we afford that we walk in the truth,—that though we "were sometimes darkness, now are we light in the Lord, and walk as children of light, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord"?

III. NICODEMUS IS WARNED OF HIS DANGER: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"—(Ver. 12.)

That we may apprehend the force of the Saviour's appeal in this sentence, let us inquire into the meaning of these terms—"earthly things," "heavenly things."

The "earthly things" are evidently put in contrast

with the other. If *they* are not believed, it will prevent the belief of the other. The belief of the one is essential in the first instance, that afterwards the belief of the other may follow. The things called by this term are evidently those of which Christ had been speaking, especially "birth" by water and by the Spirit, according to the sovereign will of God. But why should these be called "earthly" things? Because they declare the work of God as it may be experienced on earth, and describe the "kingdom of heaven" as it may here be in the saints: also, because the truth of which he had spoken concerning the new birth had already been revealed, under the Old Testament,—was, in short, part of the truth which was given by Moses, who is described as he who "spake upon earth." Inasmuch as these things were the doctrine of the Old Testament, he upbraided Nicodemus with his ignorance. It was truth which he, a "master of Israel," was bound to know,—his want of knowledge being without excuse. It was that of which the apostle speaks in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the mere rudiments, the first principles, of the doctrine of Christ. The mere "key" of knowledge this was; and the charge lay against Nicodemus and his colleagues, that they had taken it away, that they had made no use of it. Destitute of that key, how could they enter into the sublimities which lay beyond? how could they "go on unto perfection?" or how could they be the instruments of introducing those committed to their charge to the faith connected with salvation?

The "heavenly things" were peculiar to the dispensa-

tion which the Saviour in person was about to introduce, —the great and glorious truth of which he was himself especially to be the messenger,—the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew (such as Nicodemus, one of those so described); for had they known it, they would not have crucified the "Lord of glory."

The danger in which that public teacher and his fellow-countrymen were involved was thus represented to him :— If he did not believe the "earthly things," how *could* he believe the "heavenly things?" If the key by which the mysteries of the latter were to be unlocked was rejected, how could the knowledge of them be acquired? If that conviction of truth which alone could give just views of God's glorious designs towards the fallen race of men was wanting, how could the proper character of the great Messiah be discerned? how could his grace be shared, or his name be magnified? If the foundation was not laid according to the mind of God, how could the superstructure be erected in consistency with his plan? Blindness as to the spiritual character of the kingdom which was about to appear,—blindness and prejudice reigned in their minds,—carnal, not spiritual understandings, possessed them, prevented their accepting the truth, and made them the objects of righteous judgments.

Let us rejoice that an endless progress is appointed unto the children of God. There are higher and higher attainments in knowledge and glory awaiting them throughout all eternity. It doth not yet appear what we

shall be; but whilst there remains any part of the excellent majesty of Christ undiscovered, or any measure of his image unreflected by his saints, their progress must continue. Up the hill of Zion they will thus ever continue to go,—one degree of advancement being only the starting point to another. But let us never forget that the beginning is *here*,—that the beginning is in that new birth concerning which the master in Israel demanded, "How can it be?" Let us never forget, that unless that change occur in our experience, no step towards heaven is taken by us. Whatever cultivation of the old nature there may be, and however successfully that cultivation may be prosecuted, never can it introduce us into that "way of life" which leads to heavenly rest. God forbid that any of us should persist in acting as if this were not a fundamental and irreversible truth. Christ made it the great theme of all his preaching; and only as we receive it have we embraced the truth as it is in him to the certain salvation of our precious souls. To be partakers of a divine nature—to be "born again"—is the beginning of all saving knowledge, and of all heavenly virtue and glory!

NICODEMUS TAUGHT THE WAY OF SALVATION.

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."—John iii. 13–15.

We are warranted to conclude that the truth spoken to Nicodemus was not without effect. Christ's purpose, in all such cases, was to convince of sin; and we cannot doubt that in the present instance this result was achieved.

The reproof addressed to the "master of Israel" was solemn and searching. The doctrine of the *new birth*, contained as it was in the Old Testament, he had failed to discover there; and therefore, though under obligation, as a teacher of others and a guide of the blind, to proclaim it for man's salvation, he had never done so. Nor was this the whole offence. On his part, and on that of his associates, there had been a positive refusal of the "witness of God," and of the "one mediator," Jesus Christ. "Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, they had resisted the Holy Spirit; as their fathers had done, so did they." The very "key" of the kingdom of God they had put away, and the foundations they had destroyed.

May we not assure ourselves, that, under such an appeal to his conscience, Nicodemus trembled,—that, through the grace of the Spirit, he was brought under conviction which prepared him for receiving further communications for his profit, from Him who "came not to condemn the world, but that by him the world might be saved,"—who "came to seek and to save that which was lost"? May we not believe, that, though he uttered it not with his lips, the thought occupied the inmost soul of Nicodemus, that in the sight of God he was a sinner beyond many? May we not believe, that, had he expressed what he felt, the language of other penitents would in effect have been his,—he would have earnestly demanded, "What shall I do?" In the words now before us, Christ evidently speaks that which is suited to a condition of soul such as this,—speaks truth by which alone they who are wounded in their minds by the sharp arrows of saving conviction can attain to well-founded peace, and to good hope towards God. The testimony was intended for awakened sinners in all ages; but it was intended likewise for this "master of Israel," to whom it was first declared.

Here Christ makes known the way of salvation. He declares,—I. *The glory of his person;* and, II. *The nature of his work.*

I. THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S PERSON: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."—(Ver. 13.)

Christ had spoken of the "heavenly things," which his

present hearer and all others required to know as well as the "earthly things," of which he had also spoken. The right knowledge of the *heavenlies* required the previous right knowledge of the *earthlies*, so that if the one were possessed the other would be also. If Nicodemus desired to know what the "heavenly things" were,—if he longed to be made acquainted with them, with the "kingdom of God,"—he was now instructed that they could be revealed only by Jesus himself. No man had the power to ascend into heaven,—no man had ever been admitted into the secret counsels of God, so as to know them, and to be in circumstances to communicate them. No man had seen God at any time, except the "Son which is in the bosom of the Father,"—that "Son of man which came down from heaven,"—of whom it was true, even then, that he was still in heaven.

Here was testimony to the glory of the Messiah's person, in entire accordance with all that Jesus had hitherto spoken, and also with every part of Scripture. He "came down from heaven" when he assumed human nature. In the sense in which the expression "coming down from heaven" is applied to God in the Old Testament, as where it is said that he came down on Sinai, Jesus now applied it to himself. He "came down" when he was "made flesh." But though he thus descended into the lower parts of the earth, and submitted himself to all suffering, ending in his death on the cross,—suffering endured in that humanity which he had assumed,—in his divine person he was in heaven; for his divine person can no more really leave the throne of majesty there, than it can

cease to be. He "ascended up into heaven,"—viz., his human nature did, in one sense of that expression,—when he rose from the grave, having spoiled principalities and powers, and made a spectacle of them to all creatures,—when the everlasting gates lifted up their heads for him, and he entered, in his new life as risen from the dead, into the glory which was his before the world was, a glory due to him now in his mediatorial excellence as the High Priest of God for his redeemed nation. In this sense, when he spake these words, Jesus looked on the great undertaking on which he had entered as completed; on the whole work which the Father had given him to do as successfully finished; on his ascension, subsequent to his glorious resurrection, as also accomplished. But, in another sense, this expression must be understood as employed by him to declare the cause and manner of his knowledge of "heavenly things." These he knew, because of his being in heaven, so "ascended,"—being in the "bosom of the Father,"—with him speaking that "which they did know," and of himself "testifying that he had seen." No man hath, in that sense, "ascended" up to heaven;—not Enoch, nor Elias, nor any of the saints, though they are there. No man, no angel, no creature of any name, nor all creatures together, have enjoyed so glorious a prerogative, or attained so high an end. No man: only himself. But if he has "come down," being so "ascended,"—if he has discharged his high office of declaring "heavenly things," having "come down" for that end,—we are not left to inquire who shall "ascend to bring him down?" for verily he is nigh unto us, nigh in

that "word of faith" which is in our hands, and is preached unto us. Nicodemus had possessed opportunities of knowing this before he paid the visit, now in progress. The light had shined in the darkness,—the light of the "Ascended,"—though he comprehended it not. This it was now his solemn duty to consider.

Contemplate this glorious Saviour! Meditate on the truth which he has now uttered! He "descends," to take unto him the form of a servant,—to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh; and in his hands are "the keys of hell and of death." He "descends" to open the doors of the prison-house,—to deliver the lawful captives,—to free them who are doomed to die. He accomplishes his mighty undertaking. Again, he "ascends,"—the key of the heaven of heavens in his hand. He "ascends" to open the portals of everlasting glory for all that the Father hath given unto him, whom he has represented on earth, and is still to represent in heaven; their forerunner; for them entered there, that where he is they may be also, every one, not the least of them all being permitted to fail or to come short!

Salvation comes from heaven. There is its origin. It returns thither. There is its termination and final rest. Salvation is of Him who *came down*, and who testified the truth of eternal life to Nicodemus, whom he evidently sought as one of his own,—sought in the capacity of the "Ascended," exerting his power for that end by the word. Its glory is, that with its Author it is in heaven,—to be fully enjoyed only there, and only, too, through union and association with him, world without end. Jesus had not

yet expressed himself so plainly to this hearer as he did to another on a subsequent occasion, to whom he said, "I that speak unto thee am he;" but he proclaimed that the salvation which Nicodemus needed, and the true nature of which he but poorly comprehended, was to be discovered only in him. He was conducting him to the fountain of living water; he was opening his eyes, giving him the spiritual vision, the power to comprehend the light under the shining of which he then stood. In one word, he was qualifying him to add his testimony to that of others, and to be able to say from the heart, "I have found the Messiah."

II. THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S WORK: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."—(Ver. 14, 15.)

Here we have, 1. That which was to be accomplished by Christ; 2. The illustration or type by which he explains it; and, 3. The contemplated effects.

1. *That which was to be accomplished by him.*

He was to be "lifted up." What we are to understand by this is clear. He was to be "lifted up," —to suffer death upon the cross. From the first he familiarised the minds of his disciples with the prospect of his death, the death which he was to suffer at Jerusalem. He taught them to expect that event, and to expect it in the form which he described when he said that he must be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, and be crucified. That the term "lifted up," was to be under-

stood as describing that manner of dying, is evident when he says to the Jews, "When ye have *lifted up* the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he."

It is not necessary, however, to confine the meaning to this. The expression certainly does primarily and forcibly represent to us the truth that he was to be "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities," as well as the manner of his suffering. It does more. It represents the truth, that "he was to be taken from prison and from judgment,"—and that when his "soul was made an offering for sin," he was to "prolong his days." His exaltation, subsequent to his crucifixion,—a truth with which he familiarised the minds of his disciples as much as with the truth of his prospective humiliation,—seems to be announced when he says, "And I, if I be *lifted up*, will draw all men unto me." He "laid down his life that he might take it again." That "he liveth and was dead," and is now "alive for evermore," is the complete testimony on which the eye of faith satisfactorily rests. By his ascending through the visible into the invisible heavens, he triumphed over principalities and powers in his cross—the glorious issue of his great conflict being, that he is exalted to be "a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

These two views do not even exhaust the meaning of this expression. The preaching of the gospel, which is the preaching of the "cross," is a "lifting up" of Christ. It is an exhibition of him in that work which he accomplished according to the Scripture,—the work which included all his humiliation, and the glory which fol-

lowed; it is God's ordinance for making known both him and the power of his resurrection.

In all these senses it was necessary that he should be "lifted up." This was that which "must be:" there was a necessity that whatsoever "God's hand and counsel had determined before to be done" should be fulfilled; there was a necessity, in order that Christ might enter into his glory, that he should be lifted up on the cross; there was a necessity of the same kind, in order that we might have an "high priest, holy, harmless, and undefiled, made higher than the heavens;"—accordingly it is written, that "it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings;" and there is a necessity, in all time, that he should be "lifted up" in the preaching of the gospel which proclaims his name,—in the glad tidings of good things, of which his death and the glory which followed are the theme,—in order that men may learn to put their confidence in him and in none other,—that they may learn to rejoice in the Lord only, and to rejoice in him for evermore.

2. *The illustration or type by which Christ explains what was to be accomplished by him.* "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

The passage in the history of Israel in the wilderness, thus adduced to explain the work of the eternal salvation of God's people by his Son, is familiar to us all.

The unbelief, the murmuring, and rebellion of the

Israelites was the occasion which led to the erection of the brazen serpent. At an early period in the history of their exodus, God had provided for them in the wilderness with a bounteous hand. He gave them bread from heaven, with which he day by day filled the camp. He gave them also water from the rock, which followed them everywhere, the sands of the desert having no power to drink it up. Many other blessings did he confer,—not only bread for "meat," but even flesh for their "lust." Yet they rebelled and spoke against him, and against his servant Moses. They asserted that they had no bread, for their soul loathed God's provision. His anger, therefore, was kindled against them. Fiery serpents were sent. Death and destruction were everywhere in the midst of them. Their guilt was heinous, their provocation of God unspeakable, and the infliction of the terrific judgment which overtook them was the expression of his displeasure. In the wounded Israelites we behold the symbol of our condition of condemnation, as well as of disease and deadly decay. We have sinned, and are destroyed of that old serpent the devil, for he has pervaded our whole nature with his poison. We inherit a poisoned nature,—a nature of sin and death. This poison operates in one manner only, and if unchecked, will be as certainly fatal to our eternal blessedness as the wounds of the Israelites were to their temporal existence.

The remedy in the wilderness was not the removal of the reptiles. We might naturally expect that, as the deliverance of the Egyptians from each successive plague was effected simply by its removal by the power which

had inflicted it, so should it be here. But it was not so; and there is reason to believe, that the plague of the fiery serpents never was taken entirely away from Israel in the wilderness. The probability is, that in their whole course to Jordan the camp was infested with the dreadful reptiles, whose presence was at once an unceasing remembrance of the sin which brought them, and a continued evidence that the remedy provided by the free grace of God was ever necessary, and ever precious. The probability is, that Jordan alone separated Israel from this curse; and that the passage of that stream alone rendered the "lifting up" of the brazen serpent no longer necessary. Not, therefore, by the removal of the fiery serpents did God give relief and deliverance, but by the "serpent of brass," which at his command Moses made and "lifted up" before all the people. It was not a serpent such as those which formed the cause of terror, but one in their likeness,—a correct representation of a fiery serpent, such a likeness formed of burnished brass to gleam in the light of the eastern sun,—a correct representation, in as far as such a representation could be, without being the deadly poisonous thing itself. In this certainly we behold the symbol of the glorious remedy provided for our spiritual calamity. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." The poison instilled into human nature through him, our first representative, we all inherit. But by the "obedience of one many are made righteous." This ONE was not sinful flesh. He was, indeed, "made like unto his brethren" in all things,—one only excepted, that being the deadly poison. He was not "sinful flesh,"

but only "in the likeness of it." He was so *made.* Such was the "body" which God prepared for him,—such the nature which he assumed. He was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," yet he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

The "serpent" which Moses made was raised on a pole, and the purpose to be served by that is obvious. It was so raised up that it might be seen by all. Opportunity of seeing it was thereby given to every individual of Israel's many thousands,—no one was to be excluded from viewing it, or prevented by any thing intervening from easily fixing his eyes upon it from any point. Unquestionably, there was no concealment of an object upon the clearly seeing of which results so important depended. Prominence and publicity were studiously aimed at. As the tree of life stood "in the midst of the garden," purposely obtruding itself on notice; or as the finger-posts, on the roads to every city of refuge in the good land, pressed themselves on the attention of passers-by on all the highways of Judæa; so the pole, crowned with its poisonless glittering serpent, challenged the observation of all eyes, and must have been familiar to the sight of every individual. Christ was crucified, and was thus made a spectacle to angels and to men. He was made a curse, and was publicly declared to be a curse. He was then exalted to heaven, that thence he might reveal himself as the "Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world," seen there standing "in the midst of the throne." Therefore he speaks from heaven. From the heights of his glory he proclaims what he is, and what he has accom-

plished, making known how sure, as well as how great, his salvation is. The gospel has been given to the world,—the preaching of the cross, and of the glory which followed. By this he is "lifted up." Preaching is the pole by the instrumentality of which he is made conspicuous to the world. This gospel has been from the beginning, ever since the plague of serpents came. It was given in Eden; there the poisonless, life-imparting serpent was first "lifted up" to the joyful view of the wounded and the dying. Never since has it been taken down,—never since has the gospel ceased to be uttered. In all times before the flood the joyful sound was uttered to men; its latest preacher, under the dispensation which came to an end with the flood, carried it with him into the ark, and there preserved the glorious relic, that in the new world upon which he landed—the deluge departed—he might, as his first public act, again rear it up, to serve the purpose which in previous ages it had served. Holy patriarchs, prophets, and priests, in their times, upheld the sacred emblem. In forms suited to the circumstances and conditions of men, from early creation until the days which we see, Christ has been preached,—the one way of salvation has been made known: as "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," the great Antitype has been exhibited to the full view of the victims of Satan's power and of Satan's malice. So will it be, in obedience to the divine commission, until Christ come again. By his word, by the holy sacraments, by all instituted means, his name shall be proclaimed; and the truth shall be made lustrous by the beams of heavenly light which shall fall

upon it,—the truth that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

How great must the condemnation be when men have no eyes to see Him that is "lifted up," and no hearts to feel the preciousness of the sight! "He that believeth is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he believeth not in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Let every man think what must follow on that condemnation.

3. *The contemplated effects:* "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." —(Ver. 13.)

When Moses, as he was commanded, raised up the brazen serpent, the purpose was clearly made known. This was that the wounded might raise their eyes to it, and, by so doing, be healed. For not any other purpose whatever had the serpent been made, or been set up. When any wounded person—it mattered not whom—looked, he received immediate cure. That became a result of universal experience. Moreover, there was no other remedy. All arts of the physician,—of physicians skilful in other cases,—and all the usual means and applications in ordinary bodily distempers, proved utterly unavailing here. Obedience to the command of God, under a sense of impending danger, and the exercise of confidence in him, effected a cure in every instance, and nothing else could do it.

The pain endured by such wounds as those given by the serpents, may well represent the trouble of mind

connected with conviction of sin, wherever that is wrought. To Nicodemus this might appear a just emblem of the godly sorrow working repentance unto salvation which he then felt, if his eyes were indeed opened by his conversation with the Saviour, if he saw the terrors of spiritual death, if he felt the pains of hell taking hold on him, and if the spirit of confession and of true conviction was at the same time wrought in him. If the Jewish ruler now indeed saw such truth in the type to which the Saviour alluded, —if he felt the spiritual affliction fitly represented by the bodily sufferings of those who were wounded by the fiery serpents, then their gaze on the "brazen serpent" might well represent to him, on the other hand, that faith which, including knowledge of the truth, confidence in the God of salvation, and direct repose on his promised grace, obtains deliverance from all the pains of an awakened condition, as well as actual safety from all danger. Surely this emblem instructed him in the import of the Saviour's blessed assurance, that whosoever "*believed*" "should not perish, but have eternal life:" viz., whosoever looked to him, whosoever received the testimony concerning him on the authority of God, and rested on his grace and faithfulness. He could not question that Jesus spake of himself as the one object of faith, and as the author of that grace in the souls of all who are saved, which, apprehending him and resting on him, becomes the means by which they obtain the whole good implied in eternal life.

There is no other salvation; and in bestowing this God is no respecter of persons. David, the man according to God's own heart, was thus saved; and so was the thief

on the cross, when, even by his own admission, justly suffering the ignominious death due to atrocious crime. The wounded man of many years and grey hairs in the camp—the infant, the youth, the physically feeble, the powerful,—he that had murmured least, and he that had murmured most,—the man suffering under the effects of the slightest bite, and he suffering under the effects of the severest,—the closest to the pole, the furthest removed from it,—all were saved in the same way; they were saved when they looked to the brazen serpent which, at God's command, Moses had lifted up,—they were saved then, but only then. If they were wounded, and knew it—if they heard Moses' word and believed it—they were healed. Thus the gospel is preached unto all men for the obedience of faith,—preached to the wounded and the dying, —that as many as hear the proclamation which summons attention to Him who hath been "lifted up," as many as receive the testimony and look for salvation to that glorious object, may pass from death to life, and become the children of the living God. The blessing is twofold :—

(1.) That they should not perish. It thus includes deliverance from evil. They who died under the wounds of the fiery serpents, suffered a miserable end as to bodily agony and its result; and, moreover, their carcases fell in the wilderness,—they were excluded from the land of promise,—they were cut off from the possession of Canaan, —and thus the grand end of their leaving Egypt was frustrated. We—if we continue under the effect of the wounds of that old serpent, the devil—have in the mean-

time, a most miserable spiritual condition with regard to God and our fellow-creatures. We are "hateful, and hating one another." In the "far country," into which we have departed from our Father, the "citizen" to whom we have sold ourselves has made us very poor and contemptible. Our affected independence of that "citizen," which perhaps for a time we boasted of, is gone. We are at his mercy, and he has sent us into the field to feed swine. Their food is our only portion, which, though it may fill our belly, cannot satisfy our desire—cannot appease our hunger. Our case is wretched, for we are dying under a cruel malady. This affliction is ours in the meantime, the issue thereof will be permanent separation from rest,—permanent exclusion from the true Canaan,—endless banishment from our Father's house,—the perdition of ungodly men! Christ has been "lifted up" on the cross; Christ is now reared up to view by the gospel,—he is so day by day,—that we may not perish, but that a blessed escape may be enjoyed. So great salvation is in none other. In vain shall we expect it elsewhere. As the brazen serpent was the only remedy in the camp for the plague which raged there, Christ—his name, and faith in his name—is the only remedy for the plague which destroys among us,—which destroys everywhere in that world over which Satan has usurped supremacy. For Nicodemus, to whom Christ offered himself as his only hope, there was no other Saviour; and for us there can be no other.

With what earnest fervour ought we to exhort every man his neighbour on this momentous subject,—a subject which involves all that is valuable for time and for

eternity. To see Christ with the eye of faith is the great duty of our mortal life, as it is the blessing which includes every other of which we can be partakers. Conceive the earnestness which must have prevailed in the camp of Israel on every hand, after Moses had lifted up the serpent, and had published God's decree referring thereto, —the earnestness to instruct and guide the wounded to fix their look on that object of faith. In the sunshine, how bright and visible does the brazen serpent appear! In the twilight of declining day, on the unclouded sky, its background, how distinctly traced and clearly defined is its form! How soft its radiance when it reflects the moonbeams! When in the midnight darkness the pillar of cloud has become a shining fire, how vivid then is the blaze of its reflected splendour, more vivid perhaps than in the sunshine! Under all these conditions, what fervid anxiety on the part of those unharmed by the plague to direct the wounded to their only hope,—the mother her child, perhaps the only son of her hope,—the husband his wife, or the tender wife the husband—the brother the sister,—all, according to the love with which they love those to whom they are related in life, set on one thing only,—to guide the eye to the serpent which Moses has lifted up! Shall we not feel as they felt?— shall not our earnestness surpass theirs in the same proportion as the importance of the salvation in the one case surpasses the importance in the other? Theirs was but the shadow of the great calamity, ours is the terrible reality itself. How shall we escape, if we neglect this great salvation? Truly it becomes us to fear, a pro-

mise being left us of entering into rest, lest any of us should even seem to come short of it.

(2.) That men should have eternal life; not that they should escape evil only, but that they should be put in possession of actual endless good.

Nicodemus had already heard of the great change, the essential qualification for the kingdom of God. He hears of it again as the gift of God,—a gift never to be withdrawn, but to dwell for ever with the soul which by faith sees and apprehends Christ. The healed of Israel were delivered from the sad fate of perishing in the wilderness; they were also, by their restoration, so endowed with life, as to be fitted for the service of the congregation, to have the prospect of a happy passage through Jordan, and of ultimate admission into the land which had been promised to their fathers. It was much to be saved from death,—it was more to be put in possession of renewed life, and to be classed with those who looked forward to the happy accomplishment of their long journey, and realization of their great hope. True, they might suffer anew from fresh wounds by the fiery serpents, but they could not suffer unto death. With them now was the secret of cure,—the secret of the Lord; and as they were everywhere exposed to danger,—and no doubt ever trembled because they were,—they everywhere kept the serpent lifted up full in their view. Thus were they safe; and the life which they had received—a life by faith, a life from the dead—was a life which they could not lose; in this sense it was a true type of the eternal life, which Christ bestows on all his chosen Israel, and

preserves for them,—at once the gift of God, and the glorious exchange for the "wages of sin."

It is eternal life,—eternal life given now; not life withheld in the meantime to be bestowed hereafter, but actually conferred in this present time: the reward of Christ's merits, in its buddings and beginnings, is possessed now, and in all its full development will be enjoyed hereafter! God himself—the eternal God—is the portion of the soul. The nature which is immortal and divine can be fully endowed only when he fills it. Unto eternity he will love the redeemed, and satisfy them with his goodness,—the redeemed,—Christ's ransomed,—the purchase of his precious blood,—the begotten of the most blessed Spirit. And unto eternity they will love him, advancing from glory to glory, every new step of progress being the starting-place of increased attainments in the life that can never end.

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD.*

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John iii. 16.

There can be no doubt that Nicodemus came to our Lord with an honest intention. He came in sincerity, to inquire concerning the kingdom of God, which he and his intelligent countrymen generally believed was at hand. He came, convinced by what he had seen and heard that Jesus was a teacher from God, well qualified to give the information which he desired to obtain.

Jesus met the Jewish ruler on the ground on which he meets all sinners, when he seeks their salvation; he addressed him in a form which had as its object to produce conviction of sin, and to lead him to repentance and the exercise of saving faith. Far from saying one word which might lead Nicodemus to judge himself to be of the kingdom because he was a Jew, a man learned in the law, and of high ecclesiastical rank, he announced to him, in a direct and peremptory manner, the great truth of the necessity of spiritual regeneration,—a birth of water and of the Spirit,—a change including acceptance with God on sure ground, and meetness for enjoying his spiritual

* Preached on a Communion Sabbath.

gifts, as indispensable qualifications in every subject of the kingdom.

In this he taught no new doctrine, but the doctrine of the Old Testament,—the grand essential and fundamental truth of all ages,—but truth which was to be classed with the "earthly things," the practical and personal knowledge of which was necessary to believing the "heavenly things" of the kingdom which was about to appear. Nicodemus was ignorant of the doctrine,—he, a master of Israel, a guide of the blind, and an instructor of the foolish, was wholly without knowledge so indispensable, and lay under the guilt of having hitherto rejected the testimony of Eternal Wisdom in a matter so momentous. This sin Jesus charged on his conscience.

We are entitled to conclude, as stated in a former discourse, that Nicodemus was pierced in heart,—that he was wounded and brought low by the arrows which had been made sharp for him. Being so, Jesus proceeded to reveal to him his own glory,—his glory as the Father's counsellor,—the "Son of man," at once on earth and in heaven. Moreover, he proclaimed to him his work of mediation for the salvation of men,—his accomplished, and accepted, and triumphant humiliation and exaltation.

In thus addressing himself to Nicodemus, Jesus aimed at the result which he seeks with all to whom the truth is brought home for their deliverance. Through the law he made him dead unto the law, that he might live unto God. Besides all which, that he might be established on the only right principle of submission and of attachment to God, he proceeded also to declare the ori-

gin and foundation of the hope which has been provided for sinners of this fallen world,—the doctrine which constitutes the subject of the important Scripture this day to be considered by us.

From this passage we speak,—I. *Of the divine love, what it is;* II. *Of the special fruit of divine love in the gift of Christ;* and, III. *Of the blessed object contemplated in bestowing this gift.*

I. THE DIVINE LOVE, WHAT IT IS.

Love is God's very nature,—the sum of his character,—the essence of his happiness and perfect enjoyment.

You ask, Can that love be seen, to be examined and to be judged of by us? You ask, Have *we* an eye to look directly on the dazzling glory of God's essential nature, so as to be able to comprehend and admire its excellence? Or, you demand, whether, unqualified as we are to view the brightness of the divine Majesty in this attribute, may we not see its reflection in objects on which our vision can occupy itself, so that our souls shall be aided to receive just and becoming impressions of truth so exalted?

We answer:—Genuine saints in their character and blessedness, though but faint reflections of God, do nevertheless, in their own degree, exhibit the image of his glory. And when the apostle describes the grace of love as existing in them, perhaps in angels,—in the glorified only has it attained maturity,—what elements of peace and joy does he enumerate! The description is negative in its form; it declares what love is *not*, more than

what it is; but it is not for that the less emphatic. Love suffers long, and is kind!—it does not readily weary of the demands made on its forbearance and patience. Love envieth not! that pestilential mildew which carries the chill and blight of death into whatever it lights upon, exists not in the heart in which love has triumphed. Love vaunteth not itself!—it does not, by exhibitions of self, seek to wound another, even in his infirmity. Love is not puffed up!—doth not behave itself unseemly!—is not easily provoked!—thinketh no evil!—rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth!—beareth all things!—believeth all things!—hopeth all things!—endureth all things!—never fails! What a picture! How fair,—how perfect! Add to the graces thus enumerated, the activity which ever distinguishes the operations of this pure principle—its ardour, ever growing—its zeal! Conceive of it as a flame always burning, brightly burning, and rising upward to the source from which it came. Think of it as *true*—that of which no suspicion can be cherished, for it is all, and even more than all, that it seems to be. And do not forget that it is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it!

Such are saints, the glorified,—such would the gospel have all sinners to be,—and such grace can make them. In this, as in every other part of the renewed nature, saints on earth may in the meantime be only as "new-born babes"—weak, undeveloped, imperfect; but their birth of God, that his seed abides in them, involves a consummation of character such as the apostle details. Love, the divine life in that form, may be in them only as the first healthy beats of

the pulse, when the conflict of mortal disease has ended, when the crisis has passed, when for the poor sufferer a well-grounded hope at length exists that he has been rescued from the jaws of the grave, and is about to be restored to the activities of the world and of living men. It is life oppressed with a body of death, life repelling, by slow advances, a nature the very opposite of that of God,—but actually repelling it, and, in the end, made triumphant. In the meantime the distinguishing graces of the divine nature in the soul of the saint must necessarily be faith and hope, though not without "love." In the end love shall be supreme, and shall constitute the bright glory of the work which God has wrought in every redeemed sinner.

"God is love,"—it is the very essence of his nature. All his attributes may, in one view, be described to be modifications and manifestations of love. His sovereignty, his truth, his holiness, even his justice, are so. His law is the expression of his love; the vindication of it, by demanding a universal perfect obedience, and securing this by all the sanctions which guard it, and all the grace which produces conformity to it, is the expression of love also. Love is the soul of every commandment—of all that God is, of all that he has spoken, of all that he does. Judge aright, and you will trace all to this origin, to his "everlasting love,"—a principle of his nature unchangeable and eternal.

Who shall call in question the existence, in infinite perfection, of this grace in God? Can we see that in the glorified it constitutes the element of the happiness

which enriches their lot; and that even here, where sin has almost chased away peace, and the author of sin has all but quenched pure enjoyment of every kind, in the measure in which peace remains at all with us, we find it inseparably connected with this principle? can we see that if the love which still lingers in our families, and in our friendships, and which sheds its hallowed fire over them, poor comparatively though it may be, were taken away, little distinction would exist between our earth and the place of hopeless woe; can we see this, and question that God is infinitely blessed in his glorious nature, possessing the love of which we speak? If by this principle he binds the family of mankind together, making us mutually pleasant to each other, or, at least, causing us to forbear and forgive, so that we do not separate ourselves the one from the other; if by it he binds angels also together, their union by such a tie being the occasion of unspeakable blessedness, whilst by it he also directs their affections to this lower world, and engages them to be willing ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation; and if, also, love is to be the mighty influence, when universally triumphant, by which he shall gather into one the whole family both in heaven and in earth, so binding them up for ever in the bundle of life with their glorious Head;—can we doubt that he is himself the fountain, the source, the centre, the essence of this excellent glory? As well speak of the light reflected by every shining planet in our firmament, or by the earth from its oceans, and plains, and woodlands, and assert withal that no sun in the heaven shines on

them,—that their brightness is their own, and the life which accompanies it their own,—as speak of such love as may even be met with in this cold world of ours, much more of that which burns in heavenly hearts, and assert withal that God is not love in his nature, and in all the utterances and expressions of that nature. Verily he is good, and does good,—good only, and good continually. "Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light."

II. THE SPECIAL FRUIT OF DIVINE LOVE IN THE GIFT OF CHRIST: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son."

1. The origin of Christ's *mission and work* was the love of God. Sometimes men think and speak of God's love to sinners as if it were the result and fruit of Christ's mediation. That obviously reverses the doctrine of the text. The mission of the Son of God was the fruit and result of divine love; the glorious end contemplated being, that consistently with the divine character and government, the Most High might be able to extend his love to sinners, even the chief. All is traced to the great principle which, as we have seen, is the very essence of God's nature.

2. God *did give* Christ. It is equally true that Christ did voluntarily come, being free to do so. "He loved us." "He offered himself without spot unto God." "He gave himself for us." Of this we shall have oppor-

tunity to speak more at large hereafter. Meantime the great truth before us in the text is, that God gave his Son. When Isaac lay on the altar, bound, motionless, awaiting the stroke of his father's uplifted hand, he gave himself up to death, as obeying the authority under which his father acted in all that he was doing; but the type specially intended in that case was not Isaac's offering himself, but Abraham's gift of his son.

God gave Christ, on his institution to his high office in the everlasting covenant. This gift his hand and council did determine from eternity.

He gave him, also, by sending him into the world. "To us a child is born, to us a Son is *given.*" "Moses gave you not that bread; my Father *giveth* you the true bread from heaven." Though we cannot comprehend it, nor can angels even the highest in glory, yet in some mysterious sense there was a parting when God gave his Son. There was a sense in which, though still on the throne of the majesty in heaven, the "Son" descended:—"Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." Abraham was required to give up Isaac—his only son—the child of promise—the son in whom centred all the future hopes of the church on earth,—that he might be made, in some faint measure, to comprehend what God did in giving his own Son,—him whose day the patriarch rejoiced to see, whose day he did see, and was glad.

But, especially, God gave Christ by delivering him up unto death. "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." Christ was at once the altar and the

gift. He was a gift to be laid on the altar that the fire of heaven might fall upon it there. He was a "Lamb," not to be conducted to the pasture and to be carefully tended; not to be like the lamb of the poor man, which was brought up together with his children, ate of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter; but as a lamb for the slaughter,—for the knife,—for suffering, in every cruel form. Upon the front of Aaron's mitre was a plate, and on the plate was the engraving, "Holiness to the Lord," in token that he carried the iniquity of the holy things —that that iniquity was laid to his charge. In this the high priest was the type of Christ in his dedication for the sins of his Israel. His own illustration to Nicodemus, as we have seen, was, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so shall the Son of man be lifted up." God gave him, that he might bear the sins of his people in his own body on the accursed tree. As every wounded Israelite, who looked to the brazen serpent to be healed, transferred, in some sense, his mortal malady to it, so does every sinner looking unto Jesus, under the authority of God, convey his guilt and sins to Christ,—Christ assuming all, at the same time imputing his righteousness, and communicating his life, even life for evermore. There are absorbent substances in nature, which, when placed in apartments charged with poisonous vapours, immediately attract and imbibe them, becoming saturated with them, whilst the atmosphere is relieved, purified, and made salubrious. Christ was given to bear the sins of many,—to receive, absorb, neutralise, destroy

these sins,—and to them that look for him he shall appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.

3. God *so loved the world* that he gave him. He gave his only-begotten Son,—Him who was in the bosom of the Father from eternity. He gave his SON; not an angel, not any creature, however high. He gave not *a* son,—his Son becoming a son only when he came into the world and dwelt there. Such is not the "testimony;" He gave his "only-begotten Son," in the high and necessarily true sense of that name. God gave *Him* of whom this evangelist writes when he says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God." He so loved the world that he "gave" HIM. The great mystery, now revealed unto the church, is, that God did so regard the nature of man as to take it into union with himself in the person of his Son, that he might bestow upon believers that blessed and eternal inheritance, unto the hope and expectation of which they are called by the gospel!

Here is the measure of the love of God to the world! It is not other gifts, however many or however precious: not that he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust,—that he gives rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness; not that his covenant of the day and of the night shall never be broken,—that whilst the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease; not that he covers the hills with

flocks and the valleys with waving corn,—that he waters the ridges and crowns the year with plenty; not that he gives light and peace in our dwellings,—that though he cause grief, yet he has compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies. No. These are but the drops of the bucket,—mere accidents connected with the glorious blessing itself,—the mere setting of the pearl of great price, not the pearl itself,—the mere grateful foliage on the margin of the life-giving fountain of the desert, not the fountain itself! "He *so* loved the world, that he gave *his only-begotten Son!*" We possibly may think much, think every thing, of the mere accidents, and count them to be the measure of the divine love, but how fatal the mistake, and how dishonouring such a sentiment to the unspeakable gift of his grace! Behold the true measure of the love of God announced here! See it not in any thing else. Its height who can tell, its depth who can fathom? Measureless, in vain shall we seek its limits by ascending above the highest heavens, or by descending deeper than the lowest abyss!

"God so loved the *world.*" Does God, then, love sinners—his enemies—those with whom he is angry every day, and who shall at length be banished eternally from his presence? Must we not limit the signification of this expression? Does not the evangelist speak of the world of the elect, of the sanctified?

The question so proposed is necessarily suggested by the text, and being raised, demands and deserves careful consideration, and an exposition according to revealed truth.

We answer, then, that with the love of complacency—that is, of delight in them and satisfaction with them—God loves, and can love, only the "elect"—believers through his grace. With delight—delight in their persons—he beholds them every day; and they only are so loved. He contemplates them in Christ,—in their relation to him,—adorned with the garments of salvation, beautified with the robe of righteousness. In them only is to be found the fruit of sanctifying grace, his own workmanship, and he delights to behold it. Whatever the stage of its progress, he is satisfied. The husbandman, when he perceives the blade shooting through the soil into which the precious seed had but recently been cast by him, may be filled with a sentiment of present pleasure and joyful anticipation, as grateful as when at length he rejoices in the rich harvest and returns bearing his sheaves with him. Who will say that a mother's heart does not beat with excitement as joyful, and as full of secret thanksgiving, when she witnesses the first tottering steps of her infant in its earnest though imperfect attempts to exert the powers of life, as when, in later years, the maturity of manhood has for ever put away childish things? In the spiritual world there is first the "blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear"—or "the new-born babes," "the little children," the "young men," as well as the "fathers." In whatever condition the generation of God's true people appear, he delights in them for the sake of his dear Son. They are precious to him as the apple of his eye. In all their afflictions he is afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saves them.

He carries them from the womb, even unto old age and to hoar hairs. As they are the travail of Christ's soul, the fruit of his humiliation and agony, they are his "jewels," never to be forgotten or neglected, never to be lost or to perish. They are kept, by his power, through faith unto salvation, and at last it will be said unto them, "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

But it is true also that God loves the "WORLD," in the widest acceptation of the word, he loves it with the love of good-will, of divine benevolence;—he loves the "world," not limiting the signification of that term to the "elect," —to those redeemed, to the saved by grace according to the purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world was. It is of God's nature to seek and to delight in the happiness of his creatures. He made them for happiness. He made us, the children of men, for the highest enjoyment of intellectual and moral creatures. It is true indeed, likewise, that he has determined the way in which our happiness is to be secured and enjoyed,— the channel through which it is to come to us. He has not left his creatures to choose independently for themselves in this matter. He has not bestowed on them a prerogative unsuited to their circumstances, and of the due exercise of which they are necessarily incapable. His unalterable law is, that in himself—in the knowledge of him, in intercourse with him, and in holy submission to his will—we, like all his spiritual offspring, shall find our high and only worthy enjoyment. For happiness in *this*, the only legitimate form, he made us. Evil

has come on us because we wished not to retain the knowledge of God; and it continues to oppress every man, because he desires not to return to that knowledge, but despises to seek after it. We have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and we have hewn out for ourselves broken cisterns which can hold no water. We eat,—we fill our belly with husks,—but our soul is not satisfied. We drink,—but not of the water which he gives,—and therefore we remain under the power and under the unappeasable craving of our deadly thirst. We have wandered from our only well-spring. We have exposed ourselves to ruin. The law which determines the great question of happiness, connecting that condition inseparably with a right relation to God, is unalterable, and must be so. Only in the favour, and in the house of God our Father alone, can creatures, endowed as we are, find their rest and their peace. They who are separate from him, and who shall abide in their separation, must perish; and on such this sentence has already begun to take effect.

But hear him when he speaks to sinners in the state of ignorant and fatal rebellion, of which we thus testify: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" Such is the address and expostulation by which he declares the sentiments of his heart towards the "world" of the ungodly. He does not content himself, moreover, with merely putting this on record. Far from that; an ordinance has been instituted to press this truth on the attention of the self-deceived, and to plead with them in their own behalf, that they may return to

their true hope, and partake of the pure and soul-satisfying fountain of divine favour: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Whether we can see the consistency of this with God's sovereignty, with his eternal decree, with his irresistible grace, or no, is not the question here. Certain it is that they are consistent, and in due time God will prove it to the satisfaction of all. And, therefore, certain it is also, that God's heart yearns over lost sinners. He sends the gospel invitations in all their richness to them. He addresses to them every argument to induce them to hearken and obey. To the principles of their nature are presented motives calculated to prevail with them. The unspeakable gift is pressed on their acceptance, and the Spirit strives with them that they may accept. In one sense, Christ is *given* to them, for nothing ruins them—not even the greatest sins—but the positive refusal and rejection of Him who came in the name of the Lord to save us. Read the enumeration of the sins of those to whom the gospel was sent, and with whom it availed for salvation, in the days of the apostles (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10), and say if it be not so: and read again (ver. 11), "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Nothing of this kind was ever true of fallen angels. God never dealt with them as he deals with fallen men, even with those who shall at length share their dreadful fate.

We are truly in a different position. As if in contrast, it is proclaimed that when he "passed by angels," "he *so loved the world*, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Every man, therefore, whoever he be, is without excuse, who remains in a state of unconcern and unbelief, who continues impenitently in his sins. "Awake, thou that sleepest!"

III. THE BLESSED OBJECT CONTEMPLATED IN BESTOWING THIS GIFT: "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

On this point we have spoken in the previous lecture. The wounded Israelites were to look to the brazen serpent that their carcasses might not fall in the wilderness, and also that they might at length inherit the land promised to their fathers,—the "better country" than the wilderness. The object of the gift of Christ is,—

1. To prevent dreadful evil. Who can tell what is included in perishing? It must imply eternal separation from God,—from the fountain of all good and all enjoyment,—from the centre of love, the bosom of undoubted affection on which the soul could securely rest. It must imply our becoming the victims of all that is the opposite of love,—of all malignant passions in ourselves and in others, and of all the punishment necessarily connected with their prevalence,—victims "of the worm that never dies, the fire that is never quenched." God gave Christ that he might save us from this.

2. To bestow unspeakable good. The recovered

Israelite went up to Canaan, possessed the good land, and had his inheritance divided to him by lot. The saved soul shall have everlasting life. Who can tell the preciousness of that inheritance which is the purchase of the blood of Jesus? The resurrection past, the "adoption" in its full sense come, it will be residence with God for evermore,—with him in Christ,—under his eye, and in the enjoyment of his love. "I have loved you with an everlasting love:" then it will be known what that is. Now we judge of it seeing darkly as through a glass: the dimness of vision will then be for ever gone. The full glory of the promise will be realised.

These blessings, so precious, are the object contemplated in our behalf in the gift of the only-begotten Son of God; both these, namely, that we should not perish, and that we should have everlasting life. They might have been separated, and one only have been conferred: they are not separated. The father of the "younger son" might have in compassion paid his debts contracted in the "far country" into which he had travelled; he might have rescued him from the low condition and degradation to which he had there reduced himself; he might have clothed him, and given him outward equipments somewhat worthy of his origin, and of various kinds suited to circumstances; but, ashamed of him, and unwilling to receive or admit him to a place among the other children of the household, he might have treated him (under the instigation of the elder brother) as Abraham, under the instigation of Sarah, treated Ishmael—he might have provided him with a separate establishment at a distance;

and, though recalled from his banishment, have forbidden him to see his face. But the father acted not so. He did, indeed, deliver his son, so that he perished not in the "far land." But he did more. He received him to his home and to his heart,—he clothed him with the best robe: he put on him the ring and the shoes, tokens of an endless reconciliation, and of the taking away of a condition of menial servility. All this the recovered outcast inherited.

Many would be contented, both for themselves and for others, with the divided blessing. It is too much the spirit of the times in which we live to think and act as if the mere outward reclaiming of the outcasts were every thing, to the neglect of the glorious object, and no less glorious promises of the gospel. What is sought by many, is, at the best, but the boarding out of the children, but securing for them the aliment required by the separated; the state of separation being a small evil comparatively in the eyes of those philanthropists, a small evil compared to the want of the pauper aliment. Let us remember God is not content with this arrangement. It cannot meet his views. He will have his children to be *brought home* to him, and to be blessed by that means, and by that means only. He appoints no half-way house in which they are to be in course of time prepared for his receiving them, and meanwhile to become contented with themselves. They are to come directly home, that they may at once receive the good things of the covenant which are in store for them, —in store in both the forms of which we have spoken,— that they *may not perish*,—that they *may have everlast-*

ing life,—that they may have this in its first-fruits here, and in its full harvest hereafter.

Is it asked, "Of whom is this spoken?" I answer, "Of whosoever believeth on him." Not of the Jews merely, nor of those who may fancy themselves to be favourites, but of any man,—any man in this world,—of sinners of whatever character. It is spoken of them, however, only if they come to Christ,—only if they look to him as the wounded Israelite looked to the serpent lifted up. Need I remind you of the word, "As many as *received him,* to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as *believed in* his name"? Need I remind you further, that these all were such as "were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, *but of God?*"—these; "any man;" for any man may receive the Spirit of grace, may receive faith, and with it the gift of everlasting life.

Do WE believe the glad tidings? Do we believe in the love of God? in the gift of Christ? in the blessed will of God made known for our salvation? Do we care for it, or do we take an interest in the great question which the subject presents to our solemn consideration? What is Christ's mission-work to us? Have we rejoiced in it from its practical operation in our experience, and do we, through grace working effectually in us, return his love? Or, have we hitherto counted ourselves unworthy of eternal life?

If we are sinners who have been convinced of sin as Nicodemus was, then how blessed shall this precious scripture be to us! Christ spoke this to a soul prepared to

listen, prepared to receive it. The preparation was by his grace communicated to him. May there be prepared souls among us; may he prepare them, that the good seed falling on good hearts, and bringing forth in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some an hundred-fold, the King, our beloved, may come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits!

SALVATION IS BY FAITH.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."—John iii. 17, 18.

Let us not forget that we are still occupied with the address of the Saviour to Nicodemus. Let us seek to realise his circumstances, his prejudices, and the preconceptions under the power of which he had sought him. Bear in mind that he was one who held it as a fixed belief that the kingdom of God, then at hand, was to be specially confined to the Jews; that the object of its establishment was certainly to secure their national glory, and to confirm their supremacy over all the kingdoms of the earth.

Then, consider Christ dealing with him, as he deals with every man, by his word, for his personal salvation, and aiming to impress his soul with the conviction that spiritual life alone could constitute him a subject of the coming kingdom. Keep in mind, also, that he would have the learned ruler to understand that the communication of the blessings of salvation was not to be confined to the literal Israel, but was to be extended to the whole world—

to Jew and Gentile alike. The doctrine of the necessity of spiritual personal salvation was not new. Nicodemus was, indeed, ignorant of it: this was his great sin: but it was the doctrine of the Old Testament, and of all Scripture. Nor was it new doctrine that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs of similar privileges with the Jews, though Nicodemus and his fellow-countrymen were still more profoundly ignorant of this. Both these truths, however, were now pressed on his acceptance.

If we conclude that Nicodemus was savingly convinced, and humbled under the sense of sin, how precious to him must have been the truth that "Christ crucified" was to be to all sinners what the serpent in the wilderness had been to the wounded Israelites there! If he had a heart to feel for others, how precious to him must have been the thought, that for all, of every nation, who might believe, this same great Redeemer was provided! If we may suppose Nicodemus bewildered by his Jewish preconceptions, and asking "How can these things be?"—having some dim notion that, though salvation might be the special gift to the peculiar people of Jehovah, it could not be the same to others,—what light must it have given to his mind when the original source of this great good was made known! That source was the eternal love of God,—his love not to one portion of the inhabitants of the world, but to all. He so loved men of every name that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever of them believed in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

In the verses now read we have,—I. *A repetition*

and confirmation of the doctrine that salvation is by the gift of Christ; II. *A statement of the way by which men become partakers of this salvation;* and, III. *The reason why men perish although it has been provided.*

I. A REPETITION AND CONFIRMATION OF THE DOCTRINE THAT SALVATION IS BY THE GIFT OF CHRIST: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."—(Ver. 17.)

I shall not revert to what has already been spoken of this gift of God: I shall not speak again of Christ's institution into office in the everlasting covenant; of his mission, and of his parting with the Father; of his being given up to death, an altar gift; of the sins of all the saved being laid upon him. To these points I have already fully adverted; for they are included in the general announcement of the preceding text, "that God sent his Son into the world." This mission, we are now informed, was—1. not to condemn the world; but, 2. that the world might be saved.

1. *Christ came not to condemn the world.*

It might certainly have been expected that God would send his Son in judgment, to bring men to account, and to execute on them a righteous sentence of wrath. Looking at the whole condition of the world, this might well have been believed to have been the object of Christ's coming. Had there been among men bitter lamentation over the effects of their fall from the favour of God; had there been earnestness in seeking that some mode of de-

liverance might be devised; had efforts been ever put forth with a view to cast off the evil of sin, though all these efforts proved unsuccessful; had there been a never-ceasing, agonising cry of, "What shall we do?" we might expect that God possibly would exercise mercy, and that in such circumstances the mission of Christ might have had rescue as its end. But there was nothing of this, no sense of sin, no compunctions under it, no one exclaiming, "What have I done?" A universal disregard of God, an open rebellion against him, distinguished men of every name, of every climate, and of every country. If any exceptions at all existed, they were found in the few hidden ones, such as Simeon and Anna, who were rare cases, despised of others, and as precious as rare. None sought salvation. All were averse to it. The one prevailing desire was for free and unfettered permission to commit sin with impunity. No better heaven presented itself to human conception than the liberty, and power, and opportunity to gratify the vile lusts of depraved nature, and to revel in the unrestricted wickedness of unsanctified affections of every name. What could be expected, then, but that God would send his Son to judge, to condemn, and to destroy the world?

Taking into consideration the errands on which he had sent messengers from heaven to earth on other occasions, what could men reasonably expect but this? In some remarkable instances, to highly-favoured individuals,—few in number, however,—he had sent messengers of mercy. But when his commissioned agents came to avowed enemies, not to his suffering and believing servants, they had

come as ministers of wrath to execute vengeance—they had come only in that character. For what purpose had he sent his angels to Sodom and to the other cities of the plain?—to Egypt, on the memorable occasion when the first-born in every dwelling in that doomed land perished?—to the camp of the Assyrians, when one hundred and eighty-five thousand were destroyed by the blast which came on them? What could men reasonably suppose, with such examples before them, if they heard that God was about to send his Son into the world to execute his righteous will on the children of mankind, but that judgment unto condemnation—judgment such as came in those instances—must surely fall on the guilty,—fall on them in proportion to the magnitude of the offence which they had given?

Further, when we take into account God's foreknowledge of what Christ should certainly meet with in the world; that he should be in it—in the world which was made by him—and that the world should refuse to know him; that he should come unto his own, and that his own should refuse to receive him;—worse still, that now sending his Son as the successor of his servants the prophets, who had in the world been uniformly persecuted and put to death, the world should take that Son, saying in their hearts, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him," and with wicked hands should actually "crucify and slay him,"—what could they anticipate, but that he should be sent to pour out the vials of wrath on the transgressors, in terrific punishment of guilt so heinous?

That such anticipations should have been realised would

indeed have been natural and reasonable under all the circumstances; but the glorious truth, announced by the Saviour, declared that whatever might be the thoughts of men, God's thoughts were not theirs,—that the heavens are not higher above the earth than his thoughts were exalted beyond all that men think. Fury is not in him; therefore such was his love for lost sinners, such his goodwill to the children of men, that he *gave* his Son,—the Son who was in his bosom from eternity;—he sent him, *not* to condemn the world, and not to execute deserved judgment! Had it been no more than this,—no more than to stay approaching ruin, and prevent its desolating inflictions,—how unspeakable the value of that mission and advent; how unspeakably precious, had all been but to procure even a limited time of forbearance,—to procure such privileges only as Solomon conferred on the condemned and guilty Shimei! But he was sent for higher grace, and for more glorious goodness.

There are those, indeed, who, by their own doing, limit in their own case, the practical effect of Christ's coming simply to the negative blessing of a period of undeserved forbearance; who reduce the love of God for the world, in their own case, to a respite consisting of the years of their mortal life,—years confined, in the extent of the benefits which they bring, to the possession and enjoyment of a mere aliment,—those who are thus contented with the portion of Ishmael, or of Esau, and despise any thing more precious,—who are contented with a portion little superior to that of the beasts which perish, and involving the rejection of a glorious birthright. Of them we shall

speak by and by. In the meantime, let us meditate on their sad mistake,—on the fatal blindness of being satisfied with temporary, unenduring good; and let us contemplate the positive blessing for which the glorious Son of God appeared on earth. He came not to condemn the world; but,—

2. *That the world through him might be saved.*

This was the result sought by God through Christ's mission. This is the end actually accomplished in all who are truly made partakers of the intended blessing; in all, in short, who are introduced into, and who are made the subjects of the kingdom. The nature of the salvation which has been provided we cannot doubt.

(1.) It is atonement for sin. This could be made only by God's own Son: and not by any mere man: not even by angels, had they been willing to undertake so mighty a work. It could only be done by Him who, the Father's equal, was free to assume our nature, therein to make atonement. Him the Father spared not: for him he prepared a body: him he gave up for us all: him he made the propitiation for our sins,—for the sins of the whole world. Herein, indeed, was love. He gave his Son that we might live by him.

(2.) It is the bringing in of an everlasting righteousness. We could provide no covering for our sins, no such covering as might make us pleasant to the eyes of God, or even to the eyes of angels. But he has done it. He has prepared an unspotted robe;—that whose value is not temporary, not partial, but eternal and universal. What the waters of the flood were to the wickedness of the old

world, what they have been to that wickedness till this day, Christ's righteousness is to all who are saved by him. The waters which cover the earth conceal from the sun in the firmament the traces of all the wickedness of a past creation, and they at the same time reflect the bright image of that orb; so the righteousness of Christ covers for ever from divine inspection the transgressions of the justified, and at the same time reveals the glory of Him who ruleth over all. In Christ, God sees the sins of the saved no more; and in him, the representative of sinners, —in his righteousness imputed to them, he beholds only the excellent glory of his own nature. Thus endowed, the sinner is complete and perfect in the eyes of Jehovah; not more perfect and complete shall he be in the great day of final acquittal than he is now, when thus beautified and adorned with the best robe.

(3.) It is exaltation to glory. Salvation extends unto eternity. It secures all the previous steps of progress in order that we may be conducted into the presence of the throne. It embraces forgiveness of sin; not acquittal only, but positive justification and acceptance,—adoption, the Spirit of adoption also,—and the indwelling and walking in us of the Holy Ghost. Christ charges himself with the whole interests of his elect believing people, that they may be preserved, that they may be sanctified, and that they may enjoy every thing that conduces to sanctification. All is under the most perfect and infallible arrangement, —an arrangement which cannot fail until, not only like Israel brought out of Egypt, but like Israel planted in the glorious land, he presents his church as a chaste spouse,

adorned with every grace, and fully prepared for everlasting glory, before his Father's presence in heaven.

For "so great salvation"—nothing less—Christ was sent into the world. It is a salvation the result of God's love, of his love manifested by Christ's mission and advent: a salvation to be ascribed in its origin, application, and fruits, to no merit of man, to no worthiness in man, but purely to God. "He so loved the world," of his free sovereign grace, that he sent Christ into it,—not to condemn, but to save,—to save with this great salvation!

II. THE WAY IN WHICH MEN BECOME PARTAKERS OF THIS SALVATION: "He that believeth on him is not condemned."—(Ver. 18.)

As some men would read the preceding verse, the whole world has been delivered from condemnation, and is eternally saved! Such a sentiment is by no means uncommon among unreflecting men. Its error is but too clearly demonstrated, at once by the testimony of Scripture, and by universal experience. Hitherto the broad road of destruction has been thronged by our unhappy race, while, alas! the infatuation of their hearts has blinded them to their fatal mistake, and has concealed the way of life, so that few have found it.

Again, as some men would read the fact to which we thus allude, God has been disappointed in his grand design. Though he sent his Son, not to condemn but to save the world, the world has not been saved, but is lost, with only few exceptions! This, like the other, is a false conclusion, though a conclusion of a different kind. God

has not been disappointed. It is true that the "world" which was made by the Son, the world to which he came, has hitherto refused to know him; "his own," to whom the "oracles of God" were committed, have not received him; the light has shined in darkness, and the darkness has not comprehended it; yet it is no less true, that all that the Father hath given to Christ have come unto him! Not one of them has failed or been lost. Not one of them shall be lost. God's purpose, therefore, has not been frustrated. Myriads, indeed, have perished, because they have remained ignorant, willingly ignorant of him, refusing his offers of mercy, perversely rejecting the knowledge of his name. But God's purpose, according to election, has stood. Moreover, in the end it shall be seen that as many as were ordained unto eternal life have been saved. These were only the "first-fruits," but they have all been gathered. By and by the harvest will come; then Christ shall see his seed, shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

How important is the question which refers to the way in which men become partakers of salvation! As to the remote cause, the origin of so unspeakable a good, it is clear that God's sovereign love must have all the glory. To each saved sinner he says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." As to the meritorious cause, it is clear that is found only in the work of obedience and suffering accomplished by Him whom the Father sent into the world: "There is salvation in none other;" all that our case required has been provided by him; and nothing,

in any form or degree, is wanting. As to the energetic agency by which sinners are introduced to the personal, practical enjoyment of the benefits of Christ's mediation in all its fruits, it is clear that in the Holy Spirit this resides. He glorifies Christ in applying his salvation, and in making it effectual, according to the divine purpose, in every instance; and never without the influence of his grace is a sinner made a saint. Thus, salvation is through the concurrence and co-operation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

All this is ever to be borne in mind, and God is to be praised as our salvation. But the question still remains, How a man is saved as to action on his own part? What is the *instrumental* cause? To this question we have the answer in the text, "He that believeth on Christ is not condemned." As Nicodemus was previously taught that he who is "born of water and of the Spirit" is saved, so now he is informed that he who "believeth on the only-begotten Son of God," he who takes hold of him, and of all that he brings with him to the soul, shall be saved. In one word, to be so changed in mind and heart, as to be willing to part with all grounds of hope previously trusted in, and, at the same time, with all the relations of which we boasted, or from which we expected good, that we may repose simply on Christ; this is to be saved,—this is to be made of the kingdom of heaven.

Had God proposed that for fifty righteous deeds, or for forty, or thirty, or twenty, or ten, he would save us, however precious such an offer might be, our case would be hopeless. Had he proposed to give his Son, that the

fruit of his mediation might avail to the extent of putting us into the condition in which Adam existed under the covenant of works, that once more we should have an opportunity, the curse of transgression removed, by deeds of the law performed in our own strength and sufficiency, to become qualified for heaven, however gracious to those in such circumstances as ours it might be to have a door thus set open before us, our case would be hopeless. The renewal of the first covenant being thus inadequate to our requirements, and evidently unavailable, had he proposed to send his Son that he might work out a righteousness for us, not only in satisfying offended justice, but in fulfilling all the deeds of the law, and had he then made it a condition that we should work out, in addition, a righteousness of our own, on producing which, in guarantee of our sincerity and faithfulness, we should become entitled to the full benefits of the righteousness of our representative, our case would be as hopeless as ever; for the state of moral corruption of our nature is such, that no act of obedience, proceeding purely from that nature, can be good or pleasing to God, or can be counted a keeping of his law. Had he, finally, in these circumstances, proposed that Christ's perfect salvation should be freely given, only demanding that we should qualify ourselves for receiving it, by originating in ourselves, and cherishing such holy emotions of repentance, love, and gratitude to our great Benefactor as became us, highly favoured as we should be by such a gift, again our case would be desperate. Of ourselves there could be no will, no inclination, no disposition, no power, no sufficiency of any kind, for fulfilling such a condition.

Knowing all this, God requires only that we shall believe on his Son; that we shall cast ourselves on the truth revealed of him; that we shall hear and receive that truth; that we shall implicitly commit all our hopes to it. He requires this, telling us at the same time that such faith, though demanded at our hand, is not to be, and cannot be, of us, for it is his own gift,—his gift, to be at once the medium of that divine life which is communicated to our dead souls, and the active principle of that life when it is communicated. He requires faith, for it is the appointed instrumental cause of salvation, because it implies renunciation of self in every form, as well as rational dependence on God, and trust in his grace in Christ; he requires faith, because to it only his righteousness can be revealed.

We call you, then, to believe! In the name of the Chief Shepherd we enjoin faith! In his name we entreat its exercise! As obeying God, acting under his authority, speaking his mind, we proclaim to all hearers of the gospel the duty of faith. It is the duty of duties; the primary, supreme, all-comprehending duty. We make the proclamation in hope as well as in faith, remembering the promise, "Lo, I am with you," and understanding that his presence thus predicted is that of his Spirit, the Spirit of life,—that of the power which quickens the dead, which calls the things that be not as though they were, and which can produce and preserve in us precious faith.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned." "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life." The gospel is preached for the obe-

dience of faith. Let it be engraved on our minds and consciences that salvation is of the grace of the Father, of the meritorious submission of the Son, of the power of the Spirit; but that it is by the call of the gospel, and through faith in God's faithfulness in the everlasting covenant, which faithfulness it is the grand object of the gospel to spread abroad. Think of the brazen serpent lifted up in full view of the camp of Israel! Think of the jubilee trumpet, the joyful sound echoing in every corner of the land of privilege! Then hear the "word of this life," of which such ordinances were but weak emblems! "Hear, and your soul shall live."

III. The reason why men perish though the great salvation has been provided: "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."—(Ver. 18.)

That the sinner perishes is not ascribed to God: it is not because God passes him by, or because, by a positive act, he excludes him from life. It is not ascribed to Christ; it is not that the lost sinner is told that, whatever merit existed in the great work of Christ's mediation with regard to others of his class, there was none for him, and that the benefit of it could not extend to him. Neither is it ascribed to the Spirit: it is not that the wind which breathed on others could not have breathed on him,—that it avoided him, or was arbitrarily and fatally withheld. In the text there is no such doctrine.

But there is the awfully solemn fact announced, that

the death of the wicked is to be ascribed to himself,—to his unbelief! He will not come; he refuses to come; he does not come, though called to come, though invited to accept of Christ, and to believe in him for salvation. In this *duty* he fails; he fails in it under the sound of the gospel, and under the strivings of the Spirit with his natural mind and conscience and affections. All this agency he resists; and though Christ stretches forth his hands to him all the day long, he continues gainsaying and rebellious till the end. The gospel he counts foolishness, and counting it so, he dies. Such sin as his, would have been that of the wounded Israelite, as to his natural life, who would have refused to lift up his eyes to the brazen serpent, notwithstanding all solicitations on the part of those who cared for his life; or such sin as that of the impoverished bondsman, who would have despised his birthright and privilege in the jubilee-day; or such sin as the sons-in-law and daughters of Lot were actually guilty of, when they laughed to scorn the solicitations and entreaties of the righteous Lot, as he travailed in agony for their souls, in the time of God's revealed indignation and wrath against the cities of the plain. This will certainly be seen, and will be proved against sinners who perish under the gospel, when all secret things shall be revealed in the great day of final account. Then God will be justified when he speaks, and be clear when he judgeth.

When we believe not, the sentence which has already been pronounced on every sinner of the human race standeth; it is not removed. So is it with all who have an opportunity of believing,—the gospel being given unto

them. They are under the sentence of condemnation; there is but one way of escape: that is within their reach, and they reject it: their condemnation remains, and they perish because that condemnation rests on them. "They are condemned already." So perished the impenitent, blaspheming thief, the companion of the Lord in death, one of the "transgressors" with whom he was numbered. And such would be the death of the manslayer, who might fall by the hand of the avenger of blood, simply by declining to betake himself to the city of refuge. This, of itself, was dreadful enough. That a man should go down to the pit, under the original sentence, declining to believe the truth concerning the only-begotten Son of God—that a man should die eternally by such a sentence, was indeed dreadful enough. But the unspeakable aggravation of the guilt of those who sin under the gospel, is, that they positively refuse "the great salvation." By this they underlie a double condemnation—the condemnation through their relation and adherence to the first man; and, far more awful, the condemnation "because they believe not in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." God's authority is despised!—his veracity is called in question!—his unspeakable gift is set at nought in the case of all unbelief! Consider this, and be afraid.

Think of the alliance offered to us by the gospel. We are invited to become of the family of God through our marriage to his Son. It is not an alliance such as originally existed. Think how much more glorious it is,—how rich the grace which has provided it! The purpose of

our Father in heaven is to build us on the same foundation with angels and with all glorified creatures,—to make us members of that community which enjoys the security of the one glorious Head! Will you refuse? By the mercies of God I beseech you to present your bodies unto him as living sacrifices; it is your reasonable service. To persist in neglect of the first great duty, or in ignorance and thoughtless disregard of its essential and indispensable character, is madness. Until it is obeyed, and we have joined ourselves unto the Lord, we are outside the walls of salvation, we are utterly unprofitable to God, we are hostile to him, and therefore we are exposed to a thousand deaths. So long as judgment lingers, and the riches of God's goodness are displayed in his forbearance towards the vessels of wrath, all may go well with them, as they imagine. But when the clouds of the dreadful day long threatened have begun to gather, and when the muttering thunders begin to utter their voice, the unspeakable loss of having no place, no part or lot within the city, will come upon the soul like an overwhelming flood. And when in the end the cry of "Lord, Lord, open to us," is met with the answer, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not," nothing can then remain for the victim of unbelief but a fearful looking for of fiery indignation which must devour him.

Turn ye then, each and all, to the stronghold, for ye are, even until this day, the prisoners of hope!

THE GUILT OF UNBELIEF.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."—John iii. 19–21.

Nicodemus must have been moved by the announcement that the deadly crime of sinners, under the gospel, is their not believing in the Son of God,—is their disobedience to the Word which speaks to them from heaven,—is their declining to come to the marriage-feast of the King,—is their making light of and despising the feast. The Saviour continues this subject, and traces the unbelief which he has exposed to its proper cause; he shows that its real seat is the heart, and the inherent attachment to evil which exists there.

Here we have,—I. *The condemnation of unbelievers, and its aggravation;* and, II. *The distinctive characters of unbelievers and believers with respect to God's revealed will.*

I. The condemnation of unbelievers, and its aggravation: "And this is the condemnation, that

light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."—(Ver. 19.)

1. The sense in which we are to understand the terms employed in this passage first claims our attention.

The word "condemnation" may express the guilt which rests on an offender, or the punishment due to that guilt; it may express the sentence of the judge announcing the crime, or his sentence announcing the punishment. Here the word evidently declares the nature of the transgression for which sentence is pronounced against the sinner cast at the bar of God's judgment. He is condemned,—condemned of God,—condemned for unbelief; for unbelief which has its root in the love of sin, and in the hatred of that light which is intended to reveal sin's true character, and to lead to its destruction.

The term "light," means Christ himself,—Christ, viewing him in the office which he came into the world to execute. His advent from above had as its grand object to declare the "heavenly things" so long promised. He is the "light of the world," the "light which shined in darkness" before his personal manifestation, and which was now about to shine in a form and degree which might be described as "the day," when compared with the dispensation which preceded it. That truth which was in him, which was by his Spirit, and which, whatever its measure might be, always was in the world, as being the expression of himself, was therefore the "light." The gospel, the testimony of Jesus revealing his glory and the way of salvation,—the gospel, whether

published as of old by shadowy and ceremonial ordinances, or as now by direct preaching, is the "light." The pillar of cloud which accompanied Israel out of Egypt, which went before them, and which everywhere in the wilderness, all the way to Jordan, shed its influence on that redeemed people, was the emblem to the typical church of the "true light." That cloud accomplished various purposes. It guided the tribes of Israel in the right way, —in God's way,—the way of life; it conducted them by that way onwards to the promised inheritance; when in their journeyings the tribes reposed, it rested on the tabernacle, and formed the glorious ensign which proclaimed to the many thousands which followed where God was at all times to be found, that he might be worshipped in the beauty of holiness,—in the exercise of an intelligent faith; it was a sun and a shield,—a "light" in both senses,—a defence upon all their glory, a covert and refuge in every day of storm and rain.

"All things are made manifest by the light." The gospel, accordingly, testifies to man what is in him, and testifies also what God has provided for him. It reveals that we are perishing, but that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish;" that "he sent him not to condemn the world" (that is, not to inflict the wrath which sin deserved), but that "the world by him might be saved." To proclaim these truths is the real cause of so great an institution as the "glorious gospel." An ordinance so exalted could not have been given but for an adequate end. Behold the end, and

let the gospel, in the mission appointed it, have free course with you,—let "the light" shine! The great object of God's moral government of the world is, that our race should have this gospel universally communicated to them; that his sovereign grace, manifested towards the lost, should be published to every nation,—should be pressed upon the attention of all. This is his purpose, because the grand event in the history of our globe is, that the "light" hath come unto it! A similar event forms no part of the history of the world of fallen angels. To them no such blessed privilege has been vouchsafed, nor shall it ever be; but to us it has, and the God of salvation commands the diffusion of this truth for the obedience of faith, for it is specially connected with the manifestation of his glory.

In every degree this light is most precious. The light of nature even is precious,—that which is no more than the dim lingering reflection of what originally illuminated the heart of man,—precious as, in some sense, sinners may by it "seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." The light of "carnal ordinances" was precious,—more precious than the light of nature,—being the dawn of another and a better day than that which Eden saw arising on the dreadful night which sin had brought in. The "true light" was introduced by the Son of God,—by the "word which first began to be spoken by him, and was confirmed unto us by those who heard him." It is by him that this is ever made to shine. He holds the stars in his right hand, and has his place amidst the golden

candlesticks. By him his representatives, the ministers of the gospel, are endowed and quickened; and through his power they fulfil their high destiny, in being "lights in the world" for the gracious ends of divine love.

2. The condemnation of sinners is, that they do not believe nor receive the truth—this light. If it be demanded why they do not believe it? the answer is, because the gospel is not precious to them; they see no advantage in it; they expect no profit to flow from it. If it be demanded again, why this is so,—why, seeing the truth is that which God has revealed,—that which in itself is more to Christians in the world than the pillar of cloud was to Israel in the wilderness? the answer is, because men love darkness rather than light, their deeds being evil.

(1.) A love of evil,—of the evil which is in our corrupt nature, whatever the form may be which it assumes in any of us,—our own sin, the sin which we cherish,—the secret wickedness, having its root in our original corruption, however small its apparent progress,—the sin in which we delight—a love of this evil (of "darkness" in this form) prevents and forbids our believing and our receiving the truth unto salvation. "How can ye believe which receive honour one of the other?" The love of human esteem, of the honour which cometh from men, may be carnality in its least culpable and least offensive form, but it is that which, according to the Saviour's word, operates to prevent the exercise of faith. And if wickedness of this character produce such a result, all other wickedness, of whatever name, must do the same. Where the love

of sin in any form exists, the heart is not in a condition to abide in Christ, or to rejoice in the gifts of his grace. As the injured eye prevents observation of the most valuable things—renders them invisible—causes their being passed by or set aside, so the perversion of the heart—the degradation of the affections—conceals the excellent glory of Christ. While vanity or even vileness may have beauty, he has none,—no comeliness for which he is to be desired or chosen as an inheritance!

Evil abounds in the world. The world lies in "darkness." Its works are the works of darkness: "The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life,"—are all which are in the world, which are proper to it, and are not of the Father but of the world. These our fallen nature seeks; they are congenial to it, and the affinity is readily and uniformly acknowledged. They are the aliment suited to the appetite of that fallen nature, and therefore we drink in iniquity like water. When Satan presented "all that is in the world" to the Saviour,—when he made to him the offer of that portion,—there was in the Saviour's nature no affinity to it, but the opposite. The offer was therefore rejected. Not one passing emotion favourable to accepting arose within him. It was impossible. As soon could a burning torch ignite the ocean, as the enemy's temptation excite the least measure of love of the world in the breast of Christ. Very different is it with men. They love the things of the world,—they love the "darkness" in that form,—and for the sake of those things they refuse him. Like the guests invited to the marriage-feast, each has his own object of

preference,—that with which he connects his happiness,—the possession and enjoyment of which is to him more than all else; and for the sake of that object he voluntarily rejects all the good which the costly preparations of the king have provided, and which his messengers have in vain proclaimed.

(2.) Not only is there a love of evil, causing the rejection of the "light," but there is a *preference* for it. The "darkness" is esteemed above the "light." Both forms of iniquity together constitute the "condemnation."

This supposes that both "light" and "darkness" are, in some sense or other, offered, placed before us, that we may choose between them. The case is even so. In the language of men there is a competition for the soul. The temptation in the wilderness of Judea affords an evidence and illustration of Satan's mode of dealing with men in that competition. He addresses the corruption that is in us, and presses the acceptance of his gifts: and his solicitations are as unceasing as they are varied and subtle. Every day, in all places, from early childhood till old age, he plies us with his death-bearing proposals. But, on the other hand, and as competing against the adversary, the Lord of life plies us too. The guardianship of parents and friends (his institution) has for its most sacred end to offer salvation to the soul: the preaching of the everlasting gospel, above all, has this end. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man

hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." In such terms the "one Mediator," "the Messenger of the covenant," addresses sinners. His servants are commanded to be urgent in pressing his suit. Every instituted means is to be employed. At all hazards his message is to be communicated. Whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, it is to be spoken. There must be line upon line, and line upon line; precept upon precept, and precept upon precept. They who speak for Christ must warn, exhort, rebuke, invite,—sparing no arrows. Providences and the strivings of the Spirit are added, that the message may be made effective,—that the arrows of the King may be sharp.

Notwithstanding all this, a preference is given to "darkness." Sinners declare the result of the competition by choosing "darkness" rather than "light." Glorious though the "light" be, and most blessed in all its effects and consequences though it be, such is the result: and it constitutes the aggravation, the heinousness of the great "condemnation." Men *choose* the evil; they reject the good: they choose the "darkness;" they reject the

"light:" they choose "death;" they reject "life:" they blind the understanding; they establish the will in its alienation; they pollute and degrade the affections; they harden the conscience; and they successfully overbear any incipient motions in the soul towards God, towards Him in obedience to the voice which speaks to them from heaven.

(3.) With the love of evil, and the preferring of evil to good, there is a positive practice of the evil,—a fact which explains the preference and exhibits the dreadful guilt of refusing Christ. Sinners frame many excuses for their sin of not embracing the gospel. They justify themselves on many grounds for shunning and excluding the "light." It was excuse enough with some in Christ's day, that he was born among themselves,—that they were personally acquainted with his relations after the flesh,—that he was from Galilee. It was excuse enough with others, that he was alleged to be in his doctrine opposed to the law of Moses: with others, that his doctrine and habits were not similar to those of the Baptist: with a few, it was a reason for rejecting and dismissing his claims, that he was not Cæsar's friend. But the true reason why all of them chose "darkness" and not "light" was, that their deeds were positively evil. Being a generation of vipers, an evil and adulterous generation, a perverse and crooked nation, when the glorious Son of God came unto them they received him not. So Cain, because his "works were evil," whilst his brother's were righteous, chose the "darkness," as the Jews did in the Saviour's day. And, generally, it is true of all unsaved men under

the gospel, in whatever circumstances they are found, that they are "alienated, and enemies in their minds by WICKED WORKS." This has proved true in all ages. It is true now. Under whatever form unconverted men may appear, whether as the most amiable or the most atrocious, whether as angels of light or fiends, "their deeds are evil,"—they are, without exception, of the class of whom that description holds unalterably true. This is the secret cause of their resistance to the gospel of God's grace, when that gospel is sent to them. Christ in such a matter cannot err in his judgment: His solemn announcement we have in these words,—an announcement which shall receive abundant confirmation at another day.

All this was applicable, in the first instance, to the Jews,—to those of Christ's time, and with reference to his coming in the flesh. That they did not receive him was their "condemnation;" it was their guilt,—guilt charged against them by divine authority. They loved the "darkness,"—they loved all their own carnal prejudices and national antipathies. They preferred these to Christ's doctrine, and to that of his forerunner, glorious as that doctrine was. And the secret of this crime was their moral wickedness. Their hearts were turned from God, and were given to folly. Over this Jesus mourned: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a bird gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" They regarded not his plaint, and their sentence, for a time suspended, was at length executed, in righteous vindication of offended justice.

But the same things are applicable to sinners under the gospel at all times,—applicable on the authority of the same faithful and true Witness. Their "condemnation" is, that they *refuse the Saviour*, and the explanation of this their guilt is that which in the text he so distinctly teaches. Shall we not, then, be moved by this consideration? The "light" has come to us; it shines, shall we turn from it? Shall we refuse Him who speaks? Shall we be guilty of this, because we regard sin in our heart—because we love evil, the evil which is in the world? Shall we reject Christ's hand stretched to us, stretched that we may grasp it and become his friends? When every sermon, in effect, says to us, "Wilt thou go with this man," can we find in our heart to decline? Or, if yielding in profession, we say, "I go, sir," shall we forthwith give our hand to the enemy, turn to our own way, and to every wicked work? Shall we do this, and so reveal to heaven and earth that our "deeds are evil,"—that we are in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," and that our works are on the way before us to judgment? God forbid! Think what a peal conscience-terrors must ring in our ears hereafter if we thus continue in our sins. The gospel cannot be in vain. The "light" has not come to be put out by us. It is secretly but surely tracing lines of truth on the conscience, and on memory, and on our whole soul. In the meantime these lines may be unperceived by us: we may be able to exclude them from our sight. But one day they will become very manifest. There are influences in existence which, when at length we shall have been subjected to them, will bring out all that is now being

silently recorded, and then the dullest eye will be able to read the deeply-traced inscriptions.

Let us bethink ourselves. Christ still waits for us. He sends message upon message, yearning over our precious souls, and saying, "How shall I give thee up?" "Say unto them," he commands ministers, "turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" "It has been spoken. Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded," is the reply. "Well, say it again and again." "Alas! it has been so done, but who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Ah! how solemn is that word, "To them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile." What can the pleasure of sin for a season be when set against such calamity! Let us be wise and understand this, let us consider our latter end.

II. THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERS OF UNBELIEVERS AND BELIEVERS WITH RESPECT TO GOD'S REVEALED WILL: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."—(Ver. 20, 21.)

1. *The conduct of unbelievers.* They, of every name, are declared to be doers of evil. On what ground this description of them is given we have already seen. It is true of them all, that they hate the "light,"—that is, they

hate the word of Christ, which reveals their condition, and also the great salvation which their case requires. They refuse to subject themselves to the power of Christ's truth, because they dread the discovery to themselves of their deeds, and dread the reproof which must accompany the discovery.

No doubt one great purpose of the gospel is to reveal us to ourselves. The gospel, in its true character, is a mirror—a faithful mirror—though it may be made most deceitful by the way in which it is used, by the manner in which it is presented to be looked into. Employed according to the will of God, and his power giving effect to it, it does discover, without fail or error, the real nature and condition of every man whose look is fixed on it. "Thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth." Like a stream of pure light entering some dark cave, full of all noisomeness, hid from sight till then, so is the gospel. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance: Thou hast done it by that WORD ("thy judgments") which is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

They who do evil—all the unconverted—naturally hate the light on this account. They will not allow it, if they can, to shine into them. Every device is employed to prevent that. So Saul laboured to exclude the light from shining upon his secret guilt,—guilt evident in his undoubted disobedience to the divine command. So Balaam laboured to exclude the light, overbearing convictions and smothering conscience. All sinners, under the gospel, act more or less consciously on a similar plan.

So to act is natural; nay, it is absolutely necessary, if they are to live on in sin. In that event, they must exclude the light: they must make the gospel of none effect: they must shut their eyes on the mirror: they must throw some covering over it, or they must pervert and falsify it. Rather than submit to its evidence, in such a state of mind, they will blame any thing but themselves, they will even charge God foolishly. So Adam blamed the woman whom God gave him, and the woman blamed the serpent which God had made: they both charged God. The language of the secret thoughts of such sinners is that of the demons,—their secret cry is theirs, "Let us alone, —why torment us!" Their terror is the terror of bankrupts to look into their books, to ascertain their circumstances, to foresee the wretchedness which awaits them, to anticipate the demands of the creditors as they thunder at their door,—such terror they have to look into God's testimony of everlasting truth.

But what madness is this! What short-sighted folly! From themselves only do they conceal themselves—do they conceal their character, as they stand in presence of the light. God sees them,—angels see them,—men even, in some degree, see them, as the light concentrates on them,—and very soon all shall see them. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." For "the Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart."

If we receive not the truth, regarding our perishing

state, we shall never value Christ. Consider the experience of all who have ever valued and closed with him. In them that word received fulfilment: "That thou *mayest remember*, and be *confounded*, and no more open thy mouth, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done." In the Jewish ruler, whose case is still before us, this was true. In the woman of Samaria, it was true. In the jailor at Philippi, it was true. In Paul, it was true. In his case, the light which shined in upon his understanding and conscience, and which he did not exclude, was more powerful than the supernatural physical light, brighter than the sun at noon-day, which fell upon his person, which threw him and his company to the earth, and which struck him blind. Ah! under the influence of the truth which then came, Paul was truly discovered to himself. There was no escape. And what a revelation to the proud Pharisee,—to the former blasphemer of Him in whose dread presence he in that hour felt himself sisted,—to the persecutor,—to the injurious! What recollections,—what confusion,—what humiliation,—what shame! Ah, yes! but these were the pangs of a new birth. They were the beginnings of the glorious transition from death to life, through which all the redeemed are called to pass.

2. *The conduct of believers.* The believer is described as "he that *doeth* the truth." He is not a "hearer" of the word only, but a "doer." No personal perfection is claimed for the believer; but he is described as one that, through grace, walks no longer in a vain show. As opposed to this, he "walks in the truth." The usual history of

men who continue in their sins, under the gospel, is a LIE, —a pure deception as to spiritual life and spiritual action. "The God of this world blinds the minds of them that believe not." Those who are saved have escaped him. Hereby are they distinguished from others. Their history, therefore, is not a lie—not a deception—not hypocrisy; but a *doing of the truth.* It is a reality. Whatever be the defects in believers—and good reason they have to say, "We have not attained"—they are sincere. Being born of God, they have the "true heart," that which is his work, the saving fruit of his grace.

The man of this character "cometh to the light." His happiness is to look into the mirror,—is to stand in an attitude that he may see into it,—is ever to hear what God the Lord speaks. He has no longing for "smooth things," nor for the prophets to prophesy "deceits." "Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Such is his prayer.

"He cometh to the light." Why? "That his deeds may be made manifest." Before whom? Before God! —before his own conscience!—before angels and men! Why? That his deeds may be made manifest: that God may have glory: that all may see and know that they are "wrought of him." With God, especially, and with his own soul, the believer has to do, as to his new life and its blessed fruits; but with his fellow-creatures, with angels and men, he has likewise to do. They are

to glorify God in him; and therefore he "cometh to the light" for their sakes. He hides not his changed, his new, his real character. He makes it manifest that "it has been wrought of God." For himself he "cometh to the light" continually, that he may be "searched" and "known" to himself. Nothing can be more alarming to a true Christian than any covered, lurking sin. It is as the traitor in the camp: it is as hidden poison in the corporeal frame: it is as smouldering fire in a ship at sea. If not discovered,—if not dealt with in time,—if not brought out from its concealment and destroyed,—it will work ruin. But as the discovery and deliverance can only be by the power of the grace of the Most High, the light is sought, the prayer ascends—"Search me—try me—deliver my soul!"

The believer, like a man possessed of precious treasure, is not only careful of its safety, but jealous of its character. He cometh to the light with his "deeds," therefore, that again and again it may be made manifest to himself that they are "of God." He subjects them to all scrutiny, to every test of the sanctuary,—he weighs them in its balances. Thus he seeks to assure himself that they are not "dead works,"—that they are not "corrupt," like his own nature; but that they are the fruit of the life of God, treasured up in Christ the Head, and communicated to him by the agency of the Spirit of grace—that they are the blessed results of His operations in the soul, who works there "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." That his "deeds" are done of God; that they are done in his name, by his power, to his

praise; that they are not only good deeds in themselves, but done to the praise of God,—to his glory as their ultimate end,—is the discovery which sheds light upon all his darkness, and which fills his soul with overflowing joy.

We now part with Nicodemus. His interview with the Saviour has come to a close, and he has retired, still hid from human observation amidst the obscurity of the night. What musings occupied his soul who can tell? He may have felt that strange things had been brought to his ears, but his mind must at the same time have been impressed with the painful conviction that they ought not to have been *to him* strange things. His birth as a Jew did not constitute him a subject of that kingdom for which he and all were then looking: that he was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of some important tribe of his people, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee, and as touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless,—did not make him of the kingdom: that he was of high official rank, long esteemed as an able instructor of others, celebrated for learning, ability, and aptness to teach, did not make him of the kingdom. This had been solemnly spoken to him by One who was proved to be from God, by the works which he had wrought; One who had announced wonderful things regarding his own relation to God, and opened up novel but satisfactory views of the divine purpose and plan concerning the recovery, not merely of Israel after the flesh, but of mankind universally,—of men of every name and every country.

We know, when divine light shines into the soul,—when divine power operates,—what a change comes there—what a change from darkness to clear conceptions of divine things, and from the torpor of death to the sensibilities and earnestness of life! It is then as it was when the sun first looked forth upon chaos, from the firmament in which he had just appeared, or as when life was first imparted by the omnipotent power of the WORD to the inert matter of unorganised nature. The emotions of Nicodemus as he withdrew to his home, or when he resumed his place in the Sanhedrim, of which probably he became, from that day forth, a comparatively solemnised member, were emotions such as flesh and blood did not produce. Spiritual life had as yet made small progress; but we cannot reasonably question that it had been wrought in him, and that he felt the first throbs of that which ultimately attained its full maturity: spiritual light in him as yet was dim; he only saw men as trees walking; but he was in the hands of ONE who could remove every trace of blindness, and cause him to see light in His light clearly. There seems reason to conclude, that in Nicodemus we have an example of God's usual mode of giving sinners power to become the sons of God, and of pouring light on the eye-balls of the blind to qualify them for beholding the glory of the only begotten of the Father; an example, in detail, of the process by which such changes as were wrought in the cases of Andrew, and Philip, and Peter, and Nathanael, are effected; an example, in one special instance, of the "greater things" which it was promised to

Nathanael he should see,—water changed into wine,—things common made holy,—things uncomely in aspect adorned with every beauty and excellence,—the dead made a partaker of life for evermore.

There may be some obscurity as to the result of Christ's teaching in the case of this Jewish ruler, but the evidence in favour of his genuine conversion and final salvation seems to be satisfactory. Greater decision on his part would certainly have shed a halo on his memory which does not exist; and if, by his sinful caution, he, in his life, escaped much of that species of suffering to which forwardness in a good cause ever exposes, the less blessed has he been for it, in the convictions of all his successors in the faith of Christ. He did not become an avowed disciple; he did not openly abandon his position as a public functionary to join himself to Christ, and become an adherent of his cause in the form in which many others did; but in the two notices of him extant in Scripture history, subsequent to his nocturnal interview with the Saviour, it would seem that his heart was truly given to him, and that he had believed, to the saving of his soul, the things which he had heard.

One of the occasions referred to was when the discussion arose in the Sanhedrim on the report of the officers who had been sent to apprehend Christ. "Never man spake like this man," said they, evidently impressed with the truth which had come upon their souls. "Are ye also deceived?" was the angry rejoinder; "What means this? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" It was a trying moment for Nico-

demus. That the fact of the non-belief of their masters should be pressed on those officers as a reason why *they* ought not to believe, at the same time that such of the people as had believed were denounced as "not knowing the law," and "cursed," put him in a position in which he could not, without painful and guilty concealment of his convictions, remain silent. A bolder course than he adopted would indeed have become him better; but it was some concession to his secret persuasion, and an evidence of its existence, that he did interfere, and by his interference quelled the rising tumult, so averting the evils which might have fallen on the objects of the council's displeasure. "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" interposed Nicodemus.

The other occasion was when, after Christ's crucifixion, his dead body required to be disposed of. The Saviour's openly professed disciples had all fled. Yielding to unbelief, it seemed as if they had then abandoned all their previous high anticipations. No doubt it was a dark hour, and Nicodemus must in secret have shared its sadness with all who had believed. We have no reason to suppose that he possessed any clearer views than his other followers, of the truth which Jesus had spoken referring to his coming resurrection on the third day. Yet, then, with Joseph of Arimathea, a counsellor like Nicodemus, and a "disciple" too, "but secretly for fear of the Jews," he showed a resolution and affection worthy of so solemn an occasion. Whilst the women only remained and watched to see what should become of the lifeless

form of the crucified One, these two hitherto unknown friends,—unknown to the church, and unknown, perhaps, to each other,—were the parties who were found possessed of the requisite courage to approach the Roman governor, and to negociate with him for permission to remove the body from the cross. That duty of love they were honoured to perform; to them Pilate conceded the liberty which they sought. God employed them to be his servants in fulfilling the Scripture which spoke of this event. They, unaided and alone as to all other human agency, removed the body of the Lord from the accursed tree, wrapping it carefully in the linen cloth which they had provided for the purpose, and laying it in the new sepulchre of the "rich" counsellor of Arimathea,—the sacred dust being thus more honoured in death than it had been when animated with the glorious life of which it was the temple. In this, as in the other instance, we have hopeful evidence that the visit to Christ by night had not been in vain. What the risks were, to which Nicodemus exposed himself in acting as he did in this matter it is difficult for us to estimate; but when we consider the excited state of the public mind, and remember that he was a "ruler," a "teacher," a "Jew," to make himself prominent at such a time, in showing regard to the crucified Nazarene, the reputed enemy of their law and nation, manifested great courage and great affection. With this fact before us, may we not believe that though to his own loss he, at least for a time, escaped the sufferings of a martyr, he possessed the spirit of one? They who are followers of the Lamb in name only, expose themselves

to little danger for his sake. Had Nicodemus been of this character he probably would have kept safe in his retirement, and would not have revealed, at a time so critical, a secret previously successfully kept. He loved much, we may conclude, and he loved truly; much had been forgiven him, and though infirmities hid the lustre of his character, he was a light in the world. Conduct like his, on the occasions of which we have spoken, is seen only as the fruit of living faith and of sanctified affection.

Let us meditate on these things. The history of Nicodemus is replete with solemn instruction; and the words of the Lord spoken to him are words intended to search and try, as well as to teach every man, and to guide into the path of life. What is our natural birth to us? an introduction to the curse! What is our baptism and outward admission to the church to us? a subjection of our souls to an obligation of duty which renders our continued unconverted condition an unpardonable crime! What is our church membership or our official standing to us? that which enhances the guilt of our unbelief, and which must produce a more awful condemnation in the end! What are our opportunities of knowing all truth—opportunities so great—to us? that which proves *the love of sin* to be the cause of our unbelief; the cause of our not coming honestly and earnestly to the truth proclaimed by the gospel to have our sin discovered to us; the cause of our despising and fatally rejecting the testimony of the gospel; the cause of our not separating from our sin, and of our choosing death rather than life!

How blessed are they who are of the opposite charac-

ter! who do come to the light! who are really born of God! whose works are wrought in him! who are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them!

Let us, then, seek to purify our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit,—"being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

SPIRIT OF PARTY IN JOHN'S DISCIPLES.

"After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Ænon, near to Salim, because there was much water there; and they came, and were baptized: for John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him."—John iii. 22–26.

The narrative of the interview of Nicodemus with Jesus ends with the 21st verse. Having put the question, "How can these things be?" the ruler of the Jews seems to have spoken no more, but to have become a willing listener, as the "Teacher come from God," whose presence he had sought, opened up to him the blessed mystery of the way of salvation.

Our evangelist having, by the detail of the discourse which was addressed to Nicodemus, recorded truth which declares the glory of Christ, and commends him to the faith of perishing sinners, reverts to the history of John the Baptist, and again shows the Lord and his forerunner brought together. The purpose of the evangelist, under the guidance of the Spirit of inspiration, is obvious. The

satisfaction with which he appealed to the Baptist's earlier successive testimonies to Jesus, we have seen in our examination of the first chapter of this gospel. His reference to the Baptist there was evidently for the purpose of introducing those testimonies and putting them on record. His reference to his case now has an object of the same kind. Another testimony of the "voice crying in the wilderness," is to become part of the Scriptures of truth—a testimony to the excellent glory of the Hope of Israel. The fact that John's views had not changed,—that when about to pass away from the scenes of his public ministry, he beheld the glory of the "only begotten of the Father," full of grace and truth, as he did at the beginning,—is to be written for the information of the church in all ages; therefore the evangelist proceeds to relate the circumstances which led to the fresh witness-bearing on the part of him who to the end was a burning and a shining light,—who was so because of his invariable faithfulness, and his unchanging constancy, in his high vocation.

In examining this testimony, both the occasion which gave origin to it and the testimony itself, must occupy our attention. At present we confine ourselves to the former, and state the two circumstances from which John's public assertion of the Saviour's glory at this time arose:—

I. *Christ's prosecuting his public ministry in the neighbourhood where John also was labouring;* and, II. *A controversy which arose among certain Jews and John's disciples about purifying.*

I. The circumstance of Christ's prosecuting his

PUBLIC MINISTRY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WHERE JOHN ALSO WAS LABOURING: "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Ænon, near to Salim, because there was much water there; and they came, and were baptized: for John was not yet cast into prison."—(Ver. 22–24.)

Immediately after the services of the Passover, Jesus quitted Jerusalem, accompanied by his disciples, and betook himself to some distant part of the territory of Judea. His object was to proclaim the "kingdom." The multitudes which the great annual feast had assembled were now dispersed. Opportunities of addressing them in Jerusalem were no longer offered. He followed them, therefore, when they had departed, and sought them wherever they were to be found. In the region into which he thus travelled, he "tarried," probably, till the time when the Baptist was imprisoned,—a period of eight months. It was before he performed his journey into Galilee, taking Samaria in his way,—a journey made illustrious by the events which occurred in that city on the occasion.

During this time, Jesus was occupied in preaching, and also in baptizing. The latter service he did not perform personally, but by his disciples. This fact is carefully noted (chap. iv. 2), as we may believe, to mark the proper place of the ordinance of baptism, its relative importance, as simply a "sign" of truths which a *preached* gospel more clearly reveals to faith. At the same time it is interesting to observe, that though true that it

was the disciples only, and not Christ personally, who baptized, the text states that *he* baptized.—(Ver. 22.) That which was done by them in his name, and under his direction, is thus declared to have been done by him. So it is recorded here; just as the things which were spoken by Ananias to Paul are declared in that portion of Scripture to have been spoken to him by the Lord himself. (Compare Acts xxii. 12–16, xxvi. 15–18.) The gospel is not the gospel (such is the inference) of those who preach it, but of Him who gave it. To despise that gospel is not to despise them, accordingly, but it is to despise Him who has commanded it to be spoken with his authority to all the world. Let us ever keep a truth so solemn before our minds, that we may listen to the voice as that which speaks from heaven. The Lord puts honour on his ordinances, acknowledging them as his when his servants administer them; let us beware that we do not dishonour them.

As the Messiah, Jesus did baptize, though it was by his ministers. The deputies who were sent from the council to John demanded, "Why baptizest thou, then, if thou be not the Christ?" The Jewish church expected that when the Messiah came he should baptize. At this time in the neighbourhood of Jordan, in a public locality, in a place whence tidings might circulate through all the land, Jesus was occupied in preaching and baptizing. Though he so acted, the Sanhedrim sent no messengers to inquire of him. He offered himself to observation by this proceeding quite as much as John had done. It was one of the ways in which he "came unto his

own;" but no deputation of inquiry visited him, as in the case of his forerunner. John baptized into the faith of the Messiah who was to come, and pointed out his person to the multitude. Jesus baptized into the faith of himself, as having actually come. It was the same baptism, and the testimony was one, but the Sanhedrim sought no information of the fact directly from him; they desired no knowledge of his ways: they loved the darkness, because their deeds were evil: they came not to the light, lest those deeds should be reproved.

John was occupied at the same time in the neighbourhood prosecuting his proper avocation,—fulfilling his ministry: "John also was baptizing."—(Ver. 23.) The precise place in which he was so engaged is named, and the reason why it was selected is stated. The place was Ænon, near to Salim; and it was chosen because there was much water, or many waters there,—because it was a place abounding in wells or fountains of water. The Baptist prosecuted the work of his mission, "for," it is said, "he was not yet cast into prison." The time approached when that event was to occur; but though at hand, it had not yet come, and so long as opportunity to do his work lasted, he ceased not from doing it. He might, indeed, have inferred, as some may suppose, that Jesus, having now entered on his public ministry, his was superseded,—that He, before whom he had come, having actually appeared, a place in the field for him who went before his face to prepare his way no longer existed. That, however, was not the rule of duty to John. It is true that he was, in his own estimation, but the humblest servant of

the Lord, who had suddenly come to his temple,—not worthy, as compared with the servants of the new dispensation, to perform towards him even the most menial offices: true, that he was but as the meanest possible light, compared with Him who was the "light of the world,"—no more than the dimmest reflection of that light,—yet his duty was not to desist abruptly and spontaneously from the work on which he had been sent, and which he prosecuted under divine appointment; his duty was not to cover the light which had been imparted to him,—was not to hide it,—was not, by any act of his own, to prevent its shining. He had been commissioned and sent by authority from above, and that authority had not yet recalled him. No word had commanded him to close his lips when Jesus came, or at whatever time the voice of Jesus might be heard. Therefore, though the Lord was occupied in his neighbourhood, John continued in his own ministry. His heart was given to that work, as it was engaged to the Master whom he served. "With the *heart*" we believe, if we believe at all,—and with the heart we obey, if we obey at all. John believed and obeyed with the heart, and he wearied not of the yoke; he did not prematurely abandon his high calling, nor impatiently desire to be relieved from it.

This evangelist alludes to the Baptist's imprisonment as an event well known; he introduces it into his narrative, not for the purpose of narrating the fact, but only to note the period in his great public career when that which he is about particularly to state occurred; yet there is a tenderness in the form of the allusion,—perhaps, because of

the connection in which it is made. We know that the sad event of the imprisonment and death of John was not contemplated by Jesus without emotion; and, indeed, it was an event which, in the early history of the church, was calculated to awaken many distressing thoughts in all ardent hearts.

Connecting what is here stated with other parts of Scripture, it appears that the period of John's imprisonment was long,—at least a year. Judging by human light, it is wonderful that he was given up to suffer at all, and more wonderful that it was for so long a time. Though it belongs not to us to judge in such a matter, we may see that the protracted affliction gave an opportunity to prove John's constancy. Before he was put in prison, the enmity of the rulers against him had greatly abated. Herod, too, notwithstanding the offence he received from him, had acquired much regard for him; and he feared the people, with whom the Baptist was always a favourite. John might, in these circumstances, have recovered his liberty, had he been so inclined, and had he yielded but a little in his stern faithfulness. His constancy was shown in his not yielding. Many unbelieving thoughts may have been suggested to his mind amidst the dark solitariness of his prison-house,—who can tell? He may have been tempted to reflect on Christ's power to deliver him, and on the scandal which it might occasion against the Saviour, that, possessed of such power, he left him to pine amidst the miseries of a condition in which he was exposed to dangers that might, as the event proved, at any moment lead to fatal consequences. But

if such temptations presented themselves, they were rejected and overcome: notwithstanding their power to disturb his faith, he continued faithful. In the case of his disciples it was otherwise, and bitter feelings in some measure prevailed. And this may explain one incident connected with John's imprisonment, which is carefully recorded. That incident seems to indicate that the Baptist's disciples were so far betrayed into unbelief as to call in question the Messiahship of Jesus, when they viewed his non-interference in behalf of their master under the false light which partiality and prejudice threw on his conduct in that matter. To disabuse and deliver their minds, John sent to Jesus that deputation of their number who carried his well-known message, and who received from the Saviour's lips the reply which the message had been intended to elicit,—a reply which, we may hope, satisfied them, and put an end to their murmurings. John, indeed, was not relieved,—no angel was sent to open his prison; Jesus did not visit him there, or send any representative to comfort him; from the hour of his baptism he had kept a distance from his forerunner, and he continued to do so: but he did not leave him comfortless,—he was with him; and at the right time he awarded to him the honour which was due to his name and his ministry.

The distinctive position in their public career, which formed a part of the Saviour's arrangement, with regard to a servant whom he so highly honoured, accomplished an important purpose to the great cause which they mutually prosecuted, of which we speak not at present;

but we remark, that in the permitted suffering and death of John, connected with his continued possession of all spiritual and heavenly blessings, we have an illustration of the truth that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and also of the real nature of that kingdom. John's victory, (for he had the victory,) and the manifestation of the Lord's favour shown to him under his persecution and cruel privations, did not consist in Herod's being paralysed or destroyed; did not consist in successfully opposing his murderous act by some striking providence,—in John's being miraculously delivered in any form from the tyrant's power; but in having grace richly supplied to him,—grace suited to his need,—grace by which faith, patience, peace, and joy, were richly communicated,—grace by which, amidst all the evils men and devils were permitted to inflict, he was enabled from the heart to glory in his tribulation, and to praise and magnify the Lord. Of this description, according to the universal experience of Christ's people, is the victory which overcometh the world,—a victory over self, over unbelief, over the corruption of fallen nature,—a victory which raises them far beyond the reach of every attack. They are made more than conquerors by faith; by the spiritual power which Christ gives them to trust him and wait for him; by his working and maintaining in them the blessed persuasion that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus their Lord. Thus they reign as kings!

That which we ask you specially to note at present, is the circumstance of Jesus' and John's ministering in the same region of country at the same time,—a fact related in the scripture of our text to explain one of the things which led to the fresh testimony by John to His glory before whom he had come. Another was,—

II. A CONTROVERSY WHICH AROSE AMONG CERTAIN JEWS AND JOHN'S DISCIPLES ABOUT PURIFYING: "Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him."—(Ver. 25, 26.)

Such is the record of this controversy,—a record calculated to suggest things painfully true.

1. *It affords an example of the tendency to sinful disputes in the church, under the most favourable circumstances.* The Lord of glory, on the one hand, the messenger who went before his face, on the other, are, in the instance before us, the cause of this dispute. They are the subjects of the controversy: not that they are the disputants themselves, nor that they countenance those who engage in the conflict, but that those who profess to believe in them, and to have received their doctrine, are beheld in the unseemly position of differing in opinion, and of giving noisy expression to their opinion of the respective claims of each, as if they were in competition with each other.

The minds of the disputants were carnal. Where carnality of sentiment prevails, the truth will ever produce such results. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Yet he professes to know and understand them. Under the conviction that he does, he will give his explanation. Assured in himself that his is the exposition of wisdom, he will insist that it shall be received, although it be but as the blind demanding assent to his convictions of the distinction of colours; or as the insane pertinaciously obtruding the fancies of his distempered brain as the conclusions of a sound mind.

Times of reformation specially breed such disputes. The gospel then is new truth,—new to them to whom it comes. Where the divine nature is communicated to the soul in true conversion, the preparation for the reception of the truth in the love of it exists. Then the truth of God is experienced to be that which the new life pants for, as that life must subsist on it. The sincere desire to be fed and comforted by the Word which endureth for ever, produces that simple and entire reception of it which ever distinguishes the saved. But where no preparation of this kind has been wrought, and the unrenewed mind only is addressed by the gospel, the understanding and the heart are alike at fault. Misapprehension and resistance follow, if hypocritical profession does not try to hide both. Prejudices are excited and inflamed, and conflicts ensue.

Let us not be scandalised when such things occur: they must come, but "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." There are those who consider it an evidence against the doctrine of Christ, that it gives rise to such disputes. Those who are of this mind seek, in what they call quiet and peace,—in the absence of all controversy, and in uniformity of sentiment,—the right evidence of the doctrine of God. If no excitement, and no energetic inquiry, and especially no contrariety of opinion, be elicited by the things which are taught, they conceive that a wholesome condition of things must be there, and there only. In the days of Jesus and John they would have refused both, and condemned their teaching as pernicious and evil, because it gave rise universally to discussions. As the amount of resistance to the truth will always be in proportion to the intensity with which its light shines in upon the darkness; so according to the distinctness, and force, and zeal with which it is announced, to the power accompanying the proclamation of the grace of God, and to the saving effects following that proclamation, will the terror of such persons be, and the earnestness with which they will put away from them an influence so redolent of disorder, and so pregnant of trouble. A pernicious use the great enemy has made of the controversies raised by himself,—controversies raised by his power over the carnal minds of unconverted men in the church. But we ought not to be ignorant of his devices. Knowing, as we do, how uncongenial to the natural mind is the testimony of God, and its innate hatred of all that bears the image of God,—

we ought not to be affected when we are called to witness such mournful results as we have an example of in the controversy recorded in our text. The cry, that the gospel "turns the world upside down," ought to have little power to disturb us; and when we see the effect, justly described in these terms, actually following the faithful testifying for the doctrine which is according to God, so far from concluding that Christ cannot be where that result is produced, let us, from the fact now under consideration, conclude rather that, though he is not indeed the author of the confusion, the glorious illumination which comes from him, invading the territory of darkness, may be the true and only origin to which it is to be traced.

2. *This controversy shows the injury which arises from mistaken views of the object intended to be served by outward ordinances.*

The question in debate seems to have been the comparative efficacy of John's baptism, the various Jewish washings, and probably Christ's. The efficacy of "baptism," viewed simply in itself, was believed on all hands. They agreed on that point. As they had believed that circumcision was efficacious for salvation, so now they believed that baptism was the same;—it could purify; thereby both forgiveness of sin and sanctification were to be obtained. But which baptism was most to be trusted? Both might be; but one party maintained that John's was to be trusted beyond that administered by the disciples of Jesus. On this the "Jews," as they are here denominated—leading parties, being teachers

and rulers—cast a doubt. They made a question of this, and pressed John's friends for an answer.

It must be admitted that the narrative is obscure; but, after mature consideration of the subject, I believe the merits of the controversy to which it refers may, with sufficient accuracy, be stated as has now been done.

One reflection is very obvious,—"There is no new thing under the sun." When the gospel is addressed to carnal minds, in all ages and in every variety of circumstance we have the same results. I speak of the carnal mind under professed discipleship,—of the carnal mind in circumstances to boast of ecclesiastical rank,—of the carnal mind in the case of those who, because of these circumstances, and of their familiarity with the letter of Scripture, imagine themselves to be savingly taught of God, and to be Christians unquestionably. In such a case it may be expected, that outward ordinances and ritual services will be considered efficacious in themselves,—that it will be believed that by and through them the salvation supposed to be inherent in them, is transferred to the soul,—though this may be also dependent on the character or condition of the persons who administer the ordinances. So Popery, carnal to the core, holds the ordinances, as dispensed by her ministers, to be efficacious for eternal salvation, whilst she denounces as without power the ordinances administered by every other church claiming to be Christian. So Puseyism admits the claims of Rome, but insists also on its own as equal to those of the sister or mother institution, because enjoying the same apostolic succession, and the

same episcopal ordination! This heresy is not confined to them alone, but its taint may be traced downwards to those who repudiate both, but yet who, themselves "holding the truth in unrighteousness," are unconsciously betrayed into the practical persuasion of a figment as childish and vain as any folly whatever by which the god of this world has blinded the minds of them who believe not since the beginning of the world. The carnal disputes of John's followers with the Jews who encountered them, show how deeply seated in our fallen nature the evil is, and what need therefore exists for the mighty power of divine grace to eradicate it. In every case the hidden disease is the "ignorance of the life of God" which reigns in us; and in every case the remedy must be such teaching as that which Nicodemus received from the lips and by the grace of Jesus.

But, oh! how sad that souls are thus perishing,—going down to the pit with a lie in their right hand! We pity the festering masses,—their drunkenness, their obscenity, their brutal ignorance, their bold impiety. But where is our pity for those who superstitiously substitute a rite, an ordinance, formally and in due ecclesiastical order administered, for Christ himself! and who, by many indubitable proofs, show, at the same time, that they are without God in the world? For them we ought to feel pity. They do not, indeed, shock our natural sense of propriety and decorum in outward life and conversation, as do the others. The decencies of life are compatible with a heart alienated from God, with eternal ruin induced in this form, and the enemy is not careful to remove the guise

of angels of light. But they who know the things of God can see through every such veil. And how does it become them to labour, as they have opportunity, with all such victims of superstition, and to pray that the "brightness of Christ's coming" may soon appear, to banish for ever the delusions which destroy in a form so insidious and so attractive!

For ourselves, let us stand on our guard. In effect, to trust in sound views of the truth,—in a mere orthodox creed,—in an empty profession, however noisy or prominent,—is an evil of a similar kind to that of which we have spoken. In all this we have but a mere question about purifying: and, when striving about words, the grand question of our turning to Christ,—of living in him,—of being his, may be altogether overlooked. As Nicodemus, very likely, never was baptized, though truly a child of God, so may salvation come without ritualism of any kind; but if we are baptized, the administration of this ordinance is but the sign of that which constitutes salvation itself, and which no rite can produce,—the sign, viz., of "repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

3. *This controversy teaches the baneful influence of that spirit of self and of party, so common in the history of the church.*

Here are certain Jews who, seeing, and being grieved at the progress of the gospel, address themselves to certain weak, carnal disciples of John, and by discussions artfully conducted, excite their minds to envy and jealousy against Christ. Both parties are soon agreed. Whatever

was the discussion, and whatever the difference of opinion, as to the comparative efficacy of baptism by John, by the Jews, or by the disciples of the Lord, no variety of sentiment exists in their views of him. Of their father the devil, the spirit of the "murderer from the beginning" working in them, inflamed by the evil passion which had taken possession of them, they resolve to inspire the Baptist with the same,—they resolve to make him like themselves. Though they may hide it from themselves, the feeling which they cherish towards Christ, is that of Cain towards his brother,—that of the sons of Jacob towards Joseph,—that of Saul towards David; their bitterness is the bitterness of the serpent, and the victim which it seeks is the Seed of the woman. The passion by which they are consumed is that which blackened Satan's heart in heaven, and which thrust that mighty spirit down to hell. As it is the form of wickedness with which he especially inspires his children, so it is that which constitutes the mark of the lightning's scathing power,—of the divine judgment which rests on all who are of him. No man can be other than the enemy of God, and of his Son, who cherishes and obeys that spirit which dwelleth in the corrupt nature,—the *spirit that lusteth to envy.*

These carnal emissaries of the wicked one come to John. They may believe themselves to be his friends; but they are not so. They address him as "Rabbi," apparently with the desire to exalt him, but really with the intention in their heart to depreciate and injure another. The question which they had discussed together is sunk,

—is not at all proposed to John, nor is his opinion required,—obviously that they may give themselves to the real subject in their mind. "He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness," they say,—in such terms describing Jesus,—"He who once was thy friend,—who was once 'with thee,'—thy disciple, whom thou didst baptize,—who, like us, sat at thy feet,—to whom thou wast all that teacher could be,—and who was then apparently devoted to thy interests; 'he to whom thou barest witness,'—to whom thou wert so kind and generous; he who was once so greatly under obligation to thee (who can tell how much, from thy testimony in his behalf?) he—listen to what we have to tell of him! Were such an one capable of inconstancy in friendship, capable of ingratitude, of entering into competition with thee, and becoming thy rival, how foul were the offence, how black the guilt! Well, 'behold, the same baptizeth!' He has placed himself in an attitude of competition; the office to which God commissioned thee he has assumed; he has assumed it, not in some distant locality where no direct interference could occur, but close to thee, and in circumstances in which interference must arise, and has arisen already; he is occupied in work to which thou wert called, and to which he was not called. Moreover, 'all men come to him,'—thou art deserted, superseded, and thy vocation is virtually annulled." Their statement was exaggerated. John, to his grief, knew this, and declared it when he uttered the complaint, (Ver. 32,) "No man receiveth his testimony." But it was the purpose of the carnal minds

of John's visitors to misrepresent and exaggerate, with fixed determination that, by whatever means, they might inflame John against Jesus!

Let us ever abhor the spirit which was thus exhibited, and tremble for its presence within us! If permitted to exist, if cherished towards any of Christ's true servants, it is the same as though it were cherished towards himself, and he will resent it accordingly. In whomsoever it may appear, or to whatever degree of strength it may attain, it is from below, and not from above. In Joshua it found place for a passing moment, when he heard the prophesying in the camp, and envied for Moses' sake: in the disciples, too, when they saw one casting out devils who companied not with them. It is an evil which may glance into the hearts of the sanctified, and find a temporary residence there; but its ejection is certain, and well will it be for them if that ejection be immediate. Its continued abode cannot be allowed, cannot find favour. It is an evil which must be testified against, and prayed away. Being faithful to the great Head, abiding in our love to him, we must be faithful and continue in our love to all who are his. Christ and John were one. Christ and John had no separate interests. Christ and all his servants are one, and their interests are one. If we love them we love him. If we hate them we cannot love him.

John's reply to the insidious address of the company who came to him will occupy us in the next lecture. Meantime, consider how he seeks to produce in their minds lowly views of himself. That intention gives tone and character to his reply. Whatever he had was of God,—

whatever he had was of free grace—of the operation of the Spirit—a gratuitous gift, and from above. What he did was not in his own name, but in the name of Him who sent him. At any time his commission might be withdrawn, for under that condition it had been bestowed. In one word, his theme is the exaltation of Christ, and the abasement of himself!

Happy, indeed, must John have been, as they only are happy who have learned and entered upon their true relation to the Lord, and who, through grace, abide in it, whatever blasts from hell may come to disturb them in their glorious condition of privilege, or, if it were possible, to deprive them of that condition. Blessed be the great name of Him by whose power they are kept through faith!

JOHN'S JOY FULFILLED.

"John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."—John iii. 27–30.

In this passage, and to the close of the chapter, we have John's concluding testimony to Jesus. The immediate occasion of its being uttered, as stated in the preceding verses, we have already considered, viz., the circumstance of Christ's prosecuting his public ministry in the neighbourhood in which John also was labouring, and a controversy which arose among certain Jews and some of John's disciples about "purifying,"—that is, about the comparative efficacy of Jewish washings, John's baptism, and the alleged rival institution and ministry of Jesus. This controversy was prosecuted obviously in the spirit of sectarian jealousy. The hearts of John's disciples were filled with that malignant passion towards Jesus, whom they contemplated merely in the light of a successful competitor for public favour. They saw John all but deserted. Men of every class turned from him, and

began to follow the new candidate for public patronage. Witnessing this, their poor minds became much afflicted, and were exposed to be easily moved by those who sought to provoke them. Irritated by representations addressed to them, they betook themselves to their master, not doubting that he would sympathise with and reciprocate the sentiments towards Jesus with which they were themselves unhappily possessed. In that they were disappointed. If their appeal tended to awaken in the Baptist's mind any sinful emotion whatever, it was resisted and promptly suppressed. He, indeed, replied to their statement, but he did so only to renew his past testimonies, and to give additional force, if that were possible, to the things which he had already spoken of his Lord.

The appeal of his disciples addressed itself to principles of inherent corruption, common to all men,—to John's vanity, to his ambition, to his love of distinction. The appeal was one of the enemy's fiery darts, designedly thrown upon combustible matter, from which a conflagration might, in ordinary circumstances, be confidently expected. Through grace John was proof against the assault, he overcame the temptation,—his soul was not inflamed with any unrighteous emotion, and he uttered no unadvised word with his lips. His gracious character was thus made manifest,—and not less the principle through the power of which he triumphed. One carnal principle can be employed to oppose, and may overbear another,—two powers of the same kind may be made to neutralise each other. On the day of the proclamation of Saul as king of Israel, when he was told of those who scorned his

authority and derided his elevation to the throne, his wrathful nature, his selfish disposition, was intensely addressed. Deeds of vengeance would have been the real expression of the predominant principle of his mind on that occasion; but he resisted and subdued his corruption. By what power? Not by the grace of God,—not through the successful operation of the new man within against the unrenewed nature,—not by the triumphs of the divine life; but only by the temporary overmastering influence of another carnal principle, submission to which circumstances demanded,—the principle of expediency and of worldly policy. If corruption in one form whispered vengeance, in another form it forced upon him the conviction of the utter folly, as regarded his future prospects, of staining the first act of his reign with blood; and of the wisdom of exercising clemency and forbearance. Vengeance was smothered for the time by worldly wisdom and ambition, plants which grow from the same root. When John's vanity and self-love were addressed by his disciples, who came to him on the foolish errand before us, he might have overcome the provocation by his pride, or by the promptings of prudence founded on experience. Materials are given us by which we can judge of the principle on which he acted towards his followers. We have his reply to them. What is its character? Is it the haughty response of a lofty spirit expressing contempt and disregard of a competition which it despised? or is it the answer of feigned humility—humility feigned as a matter of present expediency, but covering the deep workings of an excited mind? It is neither. John's

words are the expression of true Christian love—of a heart really not his own, but Christ's—of saving grace opposing itself to evil, and triumphing in its opposition.

Ah! how much of the goodness of men—negative goodness at the best—consists of opposition to evil on carnal principles, nothing more! Whatever the advantage may be to society from such goodness (and we are not disposed to deny the benefit which it yields,—for sepulchres to hide the noisomeness of the grave, and painted sepulchres if you will, are surely desirable rather than the exposed vileness of death and corruption), it evinces no fruit of a divine life, no evidence of salvation, no guarantee for stability. Saul soon lost his clemency and forbearance, both in character and in act. His goodness, which in its beginnings appeared so fair, had no root. A season of trial swept it away, as the rising breeze sweeps the morning cloud. Seek for the man who magnanimously spared the sons of Belial, when they spake against him, and brought no gifts; you will find him to be the cruel persecutor of David,—of David the deliverer of his kingdom, and the soother of his sorrows: you will find him to be one who had never undergone any vital change of character, under whatever variety of aspect he had, at different times, shown himself; a man who, to the eye of the Searcher of hearts, had invariably appeared the same, although to the eye which can penetrate no deeper than the "outward appearance," he had exhibited phases of hopefulness which excited most pleasing interest, and even secured for him, from the sweet singer of Israel, association with one of the

most honoured of saints,—their praise being, that they were "lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

The deputation of John's disciples expected to rouse him to energetic effort in the field of stormy competition, on which they believed they were now called to appear. The only response on his part to that sinful hope, was the expression of the unchanged conviction of his soul of Christ's supereminent excellence, and of the inferior but most honourable place which he himself filled.

I. *He ascribes his position and qualifications to the divine sovereignty.* II. *He appeals to those who had come to him, that in all his past doctrine he had taught them consistently with his present statement.* III. *He declares Christ's relation to the church relatively to his;* and, IV. *He foretells the respective results of the ministry of Jesus and of his own.*

I. JOHN ASCRIBES HIS POSITION AND QUALIFICATIONS TO THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY: "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven."—(Ver. 27.)

He thus declares a great general truth, that a man can effectually appropriate to himself nothing as of himself, but must have all bestowed upon him from on high. This is true even of natural and temporal things; much more is it true of spiritual and heavenly gifts. Moreover, if our dependence on God for the possession of all things be absolute, our dependence for the successful, profitable, and happy use of them is no less so.

The application of this general truth in John's case is obvious. He wished his disciples to entertain truthful views of his position. To God he owed whatever distinguished his lot; he had received his endowments of every kind from heaven. If in him there dwelt any power of doing good, any gift of the Spirit, it had come of the free grace of God, by whom he had been sanctified from the womb. If he had actually accomplished any thing during the exercise of the ministry with which he was intrusted, it had not been of himself, but only in the name of God, and through faith in that name. God had sent,—God had commissioned him; his preaching, his baptism, were from heaven,—their authority and their efficacy were thence derived. If it was of God that he had been qualified for his work, by him too it was that he had been sustained in it, that he had continued until that day, and that he had been successful. If the beginning and progress of his ministry were under the rule of the divine will, the close of it must needs be so likewise. It was for God, therefore, to say when his work should end, and for him only to discharge him from it. He was his servant,—the least, the meanest, it might be, but his servant sure. Such honour and blessing were conferred on him. He was certainly to be laid aside, but not until God's time came,—his good and appointed time. He was contented that it should be so, and he patiently awaited the issue.

If the parties to whom the Baptist now addressed himself understood the great truth which he spake to them, they must have seen that no envying of those

who excel us in gifts and in virtues, of whatever kind, can exist without reflecting on God. He dispenses excellencies, personal and relative, according to his good pleasure, in perfect wisdom and righteousness. To cherish evil feelings, therefore, towards those who possess them, is to condemn Him who confers them,—is to quarrel with his government, and profanely to murmur against his decisions. Moreover, John's disciples might see, that, as no man can lawfully assume any calling which he hath not received from God, in the end his attempt to assume it can only produce discomfiture and shame; such assumption cannot be blessed,—can never be crowned with prosperity. In their selfish, enthusiastic attachment to their master, they would have exalted him above Christ; but if such dignity were not given him from heaven, of what character was their desire?

Envy involves direct rebellion against God! They who rose against Moses, in the wilderness, transgressed not against him,—that had been a small matter,—but against God. Who makes one to differ from another? What has any man,—the most highly endowed, or the least so,—but what he has received? All is of God, who bestows on every one according to his will, according as he sees meet, and as shall be for the furtherance of his purposes. But if our eye be "evil," like Cain's, when he saw his brother favoured by God; or like Saul's, when he saw David's prosperity,—it is a rising of our inner man against God,—it is a charge, on our part, preferred against his justice,—against his righteousness,—against

his fairness and impartiality,—against his wisdom and faithfulness! Whispering, backbiting, calumny, secret or open opposition to those whom God has made superior to us, because of that superiority,—though we may hide the real origin from ourselves, is a virtual casting off of God's authority, and a lifting of the heel against him. Miriam and Aaron fell into this snare of the devil; but the Lord recovered them, and restored their souls. Korah and his company fell into this snare; but they perished.

To be dead to a passion so murderous in its character, and to be dead to it on John's blessed principle, how precious! To be *dead* to it, I say,—not to hide it merely,—not simply by cunning and prudence for some selfish object to conceal or suppress, or by some equally carnal impulse to overbear it for the time,—not this: but, through grace, to acquire the disposition that acquiesces cheerfully in all God's arrangements, even when they set us aside; that rejoices in them in the assurance that they are good and right; and that delights to cultivate charity and good-will; the mind, in short, which has learned how to be abased as well as how to abound, and to be happy in the good of another, even when that deprives or depreciates us—how precious! This grace distinguished John; it beautified the character of Jonathan; it shone with the fairest lustre in Paul. Blessed be God, the divine influence which availed to enrich them with the image of Christ, and with the elements of true happiness, can avail for us. Though we may not have attained, let us press towards the mark for

this prize. Let us seek the grace of genuine humility, and never rest until it reign in our mortal bodies.

II. JOHN'S APPEAL TO THOSE WHO HAD COME TO HIM, THAT IN ALL HIS PAST DOCTRINE HE HAD TAUGHT THEM CONSISTENTLY WITH HIS PRESENT STATEMENT: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him."—(Ver. 28.)

We may reasonably conclude that John was disappointed in the disciples who had come to him, with whom he was now occupied. To his heart the thought must have been deeply painful, that he had been so long with them, that he had laboured to lead them to Jesus, warning them that he himself was not the Christ, and yet that they still were so blind, so prejudiced, so carnal, and so easily instigated by designing and wicked men to a course such as that in which they now walked. He probably felt it as a humbling trial. If the Baptist had, at any time, been tempted to cherish high ideas of the results of his ministry, such an incident as had now occurred was fitted to be a severe correction; at least the followers then present had been negligent, unintelligent, unspiritual, and unprofitable hearers, as their conduct too truly showed. With them it was as though they had heard not, and as though the grace of God had indeed been in vain. Have we not need to see that such sin lie not at our door? May it not be charged against some of us, that, having ears to hear, we hear not,—hearts to understand, we believe not; and may it not happen, that from an evil so calamitous, the most faithful, powerful,

heart-searching proclamation of truth, issues only in overlooking and despising the Saviour, and in substituting in his room that which is wholly unworthy? Painful, indeed, must have been the discoveries of unprofitable hearing now made by John, in parties of whom, perhaps, he once hoped better things! Yet he must have felt unspeakable comfort that he could boldly appeal to their consciences for the character of his past doctrine; that he needed no other witnesses but their own recollections to testify in his behalf; and that he could protest it was doctrine which by no forcible construction could be made to appear favourable to their present views and feelings!

Two things he had ever sought to impress on them, and he took them to witness whether it had not been so:—He had always testified that he was not the Christ. In every form, on all occasions, with unvarying pertinacity, he had so taught. Good cause for his so acting John had seen, in the foolish notions and sanguine expectations of his followers. He clearly saw the rock upon which they were in danger of drifting, and, as a faithful master to them, and no less faithful servant to their common Lord, he had not ceased, night and day, positively to announce that he "was not the Christ." He had also, in a manner equally emphatic, asserted what his real position was. Though not the Christ, he was the messenger sent before him. This he had constantly and zealously maintained. Side by side with the other part of his testimony, and as being of vital importance, he had uniformly placed this. To be the messenger of the Lord was God's precious gift to him,—was the honour

which he had conferred,—was the service which he had commanded. Accordingly, he had never failed to proclaim the divine arrangement. And most appropriate it was on John's part, on such an occasion as this, to remind those who heard him, of his past doctrine. The sole object of his mission was to act as the forerunner, the herald, the public officer, announcing the immediate approach of One more glorious than himself. That done, and He whose coming he had announced having arrived, his office ceased. It was no longer required,—he had no more duty to discharge: its period of existence must, from its nature, necessarily be thus limited. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," John had cried; "He whom ye seek shall suddenly come,—he is at hand." So long as the Lord had not yet revealed himself, here was a message great indeed,—the latest echoes, but not the least distinct, of the prophecies of four thousand preceding years. But when He of whom this was spoken stood revealed in the midst of them, the message immediately ceased to have any place in the testimony of God to man,—the office which contemplated only its delivery was of necessity abrogated, and he who had honourably filled the office was inevitably set aside.

A truth so obvious was calculated to silence the too zealous followers of John. They could not but remember both parts of their master's proclamation as he taught them. They could not but bear him witness that his testimony in this form had been at all times unequivocally declared. How then could they now fail to see what their master was bound to anticipate for

himself? or how, animated with a right faith, could they but rejoice with him in that which he did anticipate?

Let it be ever present to our minds, that not the hearing only, but the profitable hearing, of the glorious gospel, is our great duty. Under the Spirit's teaching alone can this duty be fulfilled, as he can alone open our hearts, and seal the doctrine effectually there. With what earnestness of expectation ought we then to ask and wait for his grace! Too often does it happen that truths of deepest import are lightly treated by us; we do not search into them, though the time is at hand when the possession of a distinct comprehension of them will be invaluable. To John's disciples it may often have appeared that the two points of which he now reminded them had been too much dwelt on, and that a prominence was given to them prejudicial to his own position, and to the interests of the cause whose advocate he was. They might think that there was an unnecessary depreciating of himself, and an undue earnestness in anticipating and exulting in the approaching advent and surpassing glory of another, by whom he was to be superseded! "Let that be far from thee," they might sometimes be ready to say. But now, when that Other had appeared,—when "all men," as they said, "were coming to him,"—when his progress was certain, and his ultimate exaltation to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens near,—it was important, indeed, that John should have testified faithfully the things with which he had been commissioned, and important that his disciples knew it.

To go before the face of the Lord, as his heralds, is the great duty of ministers. To seek admission for him into the hearts of sinners; to obtain the consent of all to whom they address themselves to receive him;—this, and this supremely, is their duty. If you mistake, and suppose that any other is the end of our ministry, or that the truth spoken contemplates not as its grand purpose a result so precious, it will be well for us, at another day, that, like John, we shall be able, for our vindication, to appeal to the things which were spoken, to your recollections, and to the record of your living consciences, that you were faithfully instructed and entreated by us. Let the truth be heard now,—let it be heard always,—let it be heard now to be felt and obeyed.

III. CHRIST'S RELATION TO THE CHURCH RELATIVELY TO JOHN'S: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled."—(Ver. 29.)

1. *Christ's relation to the church is that of the bridegroom to the bride.*

In speaking of the Redeemer and the redeemed under this allegory, John alluded to a common emblem of the Old Testament. The illustration is not a general and random one, valuable for its expressiveness merely, but it is the emblem specially used in Scripture to set forth the relation of which he is now speaking. It was well understood among the Jews that the marriage of the first pair was typical,—that the marriage of Abraham and

Sarah, of Isaac and Rebekah, as well as of others, were so. It was well known to them that the marriage relation was most especially that which, in all the Old Testament, was referred to as illustrative of the relation of God to his people. Examples were to be met with everywhere in the sacred volume, as Ezek. xvi., Ps. xlv., and the Song of Solomon throughout. Assuming this, accordingly, and assuming also the knowledge of it on the part of those who had come to him, John ascribes to Christ the glory due to him. He is the bridegroom of the bride. He loved her, and gave himself for her. He loved her with an everlasting love, and with loving-kindness he ever draws her to himself. She is his,—his only,—his, and not another's,—his exclusively. He is jealous of that which thus belongs to him; and his friends are jealous of it for his sake too. John would have his disciples remember this. He himself had his place,—important and of deep interest,—but it was not the place which belonged to Christ. Faithfully did he guard them against committing so great a mistake, and being guilty of such an evil, as to give him the place in their hearts due only to Jesus. They were bound to choose Jesus; they were bound to forget their father's house and their own people for him; it was their glory to worship him, because he was their Lord,—to worship and to exalt him for ever. John appealed to them, that what he now spake had always been the doctrine he addressed to them in times past. He protested it was his doctrine still.

And truly it is a matter of vital interest that we should receive this testimony. Christ is our Lord,—the bride-

groom. He qualified himself for entering into this alliance with us. In order to it communion of nature was required; and in that he qualified himself: "He became flesh, and dwelt among us; he was made like unto his brethren; he became bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh." He qualified himself for this relation, in like manner, by retaining his own nature: He united ours to his nature, that he might communicate his to us. He did not lay aside his glory, though he veiled it. For our sakes he sanctified himself, that we also might be sanctified. As Eve was of Adam's nature, so is he of ours; but not of ours in our degraded condition: and as assumed by him to his proper nature, it is retained by him for ever, that he may raise us to his glory, to sit with him in his throne at last.

He entered into the alliance by special contract with his Father and our Father. This he did from of old, even from everlasting. Thence dates the covenant in which the bride was given to him, a covenant of which he himself speaks when he says, "All that the Father hath given me shall come unto me,"—the Father's pledge and promise to him: of which also he speaks when he adds, "And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,"—His pledge and promise to the Father, and to them who, "hearing and learning of the Father, do come unto him,"—His pledge that he will certainly receive each and all. Thus he chose his people from the beginning unto salvation.

He hath fulfilled every legal condition in which he became involved by such a relation. His covenant with

the Father in behalf of the bride was an everlasting engagement;—not that which was to continue for a season, and then, at his will, cease; but that which was never to end, and that which contemplated great purposes. It had heaven as well as earth in prospect,—eternity as well as time,—holiness and meetness for glory above, as well as the present removal of wrath, and acceptance with God. How mighty was the undertaking on his part, implied in this, when we look to the case of the bride,—to her debt, her degradation, her inherent vileness, and all the powers arrayed against her! "He loved the church, and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it unto himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, that she might be holy and without blemish." All this was required, and all this he accomplished, and shall accomplish.

He participates with his people, and provides for them, in all circumstances, till he brings them home. He who is a husband indeed, has such oneness, such community of interests with his wife, that what may be done to her for good or evil is essentially done to him. There can be no such separation as to forbid mutual participation in all things. So is it with Christ and his people. Moreover, whatever a tender, faithful husband might be expected to do, he has engaged to do for them. Many titles given to Christ in the Scriptures teach the relation in which he stands to his people, in the many views which may be taken of it, and of the blessings implied. That of bridegroom emphatically declares his engagement *to pro-*

vide for them for ever, to bear their burden under all circumstances, and to endow them with every needful thing. He is a father, full of manliness, full of the resolution which is prepared to meet all difficulties, and which grudges no toil for his children. He is a brother, pure and faithful. He is a friend, steadfast and unchangeable. More than all, he is a husband. His people are himself, his own flesh, his bones, his life, his peace. All that a father, a brother, a friend could be, he is to them; but this above all, he is the betrothed, the husband, the bridegroom,—as, filling that relation, every thing that one can be to another! "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom." No man may interfere with him in this. "Love is strong as death; jealousy, cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame."

2. *John's relation was that of the Bridegroom's friend.*

In employing this term, the Baptist referred to what was familiarly known to the Jews,—to an office connected with marriage solemnities, which had its special duties and privileges. The bridegroom, on all nuptial occasions, had his "friend." The "friend's" office was an interesting and important one;—it was to conduct the bride to the bridegroom. With allusion to that office, Moses was called the "friend:" God spake with him as a man speaketh with his friend; and Moses brought the people of Israel in the wilderness unto God. Eliezer was the "friend" of Isaac; he brought Rebekah to him, away from her own country and kindred, to be his wife. The

virgins and companions of the bride were her "friends" in a similar sense.

John was the "friend of the bridegroom." His office, in a peculiar sense in his case, was to bring Christ's bride to him. This was the work for which he was sent by God into the world; the type of which we may see in Abraham's commission to Eliezer. This was John's office; and he rejoiced in it. Most heartily did he seek to win the church—all Israel—to the LAMB; most heartily did he desire to see every knee bow to him, and to hear every tongue confess.

The "friend" "rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." "The voice of my beloved!" exclaims the Church in the Song of Songs; "Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills!" "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" The "voice of the bridegroom," which the Baptist stood silent and apart delighted to hear, was the glorious gospel, by which Christ's bride is ever "enticed" and brought unto him. The "friend's" *standing* and hearing, may imply that his own special commission had at length been exhausted, and that it remained for him only to contemplate the consummation of his services, and the immediate and proper influences of Him whom he had preceded, and whose title to all glory he had unreservedly proclaimed. Already that influence was apparent. The discontented disciples who had resorted to him announced the fact, Jesus himself now preached; this he heard from them. Others preached, under his immediate direction,

and as they were sent by *him*. It was the beginning of a new era; the sounds uttered were the first feeble breathings of a chorus which should in due time be repeated in every land. The word which began at first to be spoken by the Lord must for ever advance. The earth would be pervaded with the echoes of the Bridegroom's voice. Everywhere the sound would extend, and go through all the earth, even to the ends of the world! In the arrival of this era, "John's joy was fulfilled." For such a consummation he had lived; it was that to which his whole career looked forward; come, as it now was, he had nothing beyond it to desire or to anticipate, as to his special office. When yet in his mother's womb, he leaped when she heard the voice of the mother of Jesus, —an emblem, perhaps, of John's true glory and happiness,—a preintimation of that which should ever distinguish his character. His whole ministry required the appearing and revelation of the long-promised Messiah. As the ministry of Christ himself included and required the resurrection from the grave, and the victory over hell and death,—as he looked forward to that consummation, and rejoiced to anticipate it; so the ministry of his predecessor required, and could not have had a successful issue without the appearing of the "Word made flesh," and the public utterance of his heavenly voice in the preaching of the everlasting gospel. Now John was permitted to see, to hear, all that his heart panted for. "He greatly rejoiced:" "his joy was fulfilled!"

Ah! could he then sympathise with his carnal friends? Could they expect to kindle within his breast the unhal-

lowed flame which burned in their own? Could he, preferring his own personal interests, or listening to their claims, swerve for one moment from his love for his Lord, and from devotion to his great cause? No; the "friend of the Bridegroom REJOICED." No other sentiment could fill his soul but joy; and no other sentiment can have possession of those who are Christ's "friends," in the sense here spoken of, but similar joy. Let me say, if we are "friends" at all, it must be in the sense in which John was a *friend*,—as those who seek the glory of the Lord, and seek it in the way in which he himself seeks it. We shall labour to win souls to Christ by the instrumentality of the glorious gospel. His "friends" *rejoice* to hear his "voice." They will have it to be heard. To this they give themselves; for this they spend and are spent; for this they live, and for this they are willing to die. How is it with us? Have we the spirit of the Baptist? Can we rejoice in that in which he rejoiced? Is our joy therein fulfilled?

Alas! how small a matter to some is the "voice" of Christ, and the hearing of the voice of Christ!—often what a weariness! And how little concerned are they whether men are made to hear it or not! Are they "friends" who are of such a spirit? Will he reckon them so? In the great day of account where shall they appear?—how shall they stand? Will it be a small matter then that this "voice" was disregarded,—the voice which proclaims peace on earth, good-will to men, liberty to the captive, forgiveness, grace, glory?

IV. JOHN FORETELLS THE NECESSARY ISSUE OF THE

MINISTRY RESPECTIVELY OF JESUS AND OF HIS OWN: "He must increase, but I must decrease."—(Ver. 30.)

Christ's place in the church, relatively to John's, required this. The course of the Lord, before whose face the Baptist had come, was like that of the sun in the firmament. John's, comparatively, was like that of a lamp carried a little way along the dark path, until the orb of day appeared. As distinguished from all who had preceded him in office, John was a "burning and a shining light." In reference to Christ, he was a light to be extinguished by his appearing, and thereafter never again to shine,—his case thus being different from that of the apostles and prophets of the new dispensation. This was John's joy. It was what must be: the increase without end, on the one hand; the decrease without recovery, on the other, were necessary in the fulfilment of God's revealed purpose and the future progress of the gospel;—the nature of things made it so. Christ's name shall endure for ever. His name shall be continued as long as the sun. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. It is from henceforth, even for ever! What mere servant, angel or man, is to be compared with him?

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY TO BE RECEIVED.

"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."—John iii. 31–33.

The Baptist was in no wise moved by the selfish and sinister appeal of his disciples. Human infirmity was painfully apparent in them; but though their address was calculated to incite in their master feelings similar to their own, grace preserved his soul, and made him to triumph in resisting them. The principle by which he repelled their temptation is very apparent. Being the "friend of the Bridegroom," love and devotedness such as became that office filled his breast. He had lived and ministered for one end only. The world and worldly things, apart from that end, could have no interest for him. To be told, therefore, of the progress of Christ, was only to give him the assurance that God had accomplished his purpose in the ministry on which he had sent him, and to afford him the blessed prospect, that in due time he should, by grace, finish his course with joy.

In continuation, the Baptist's reply teaches,—I. *Christ's universal supremacy, a supremacy which excludes all comparison with what is "earthly;"* II. *The distinctive character of his testimony as the Great Teacher, and the general result which hitherto had followed it;* and, III. *The importance of receiving that testimony.*

I. CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL SUPREMACY, WHICH EXCLUDES ALL COMPARISON WITH WHAT IS "EARTHLY:" "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all."—(Ver. 31.) That is, Christ was from above, and is above all; John was of the earth.

1. *Christ was from above.* His seat was in heaven. Thence he came to his own. Because this was so, he is the "true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He is "the Lord from heaven," "the Son of man, who is in heaven," and who "ascended into heaven as he first came down from heaven." Of him alone can this be asserted; for it is a glory belonging to him, and not to another. By such glory he was distinguished from his forerunner, as well as from all who had preceded him; by such glory he is distinguished from all of every name and degree who are of the "earth."

From above, he is "above all!" He excels all, and has the pre-eminence; he exercises rule over all; to him belong the kingdom and the power.

He is pre-eminent. This he is with reference to the whole creation of God; but he is especially pre-eminent among all who are illustrious in his church, for he is the

Head, the King. They, indeed, are princes, noble by their heavenly birth, by the rank to which they have been raised, and by their title to the incorruptible inheritance; but he is the Prince of princes, "fairer than the sons of men," and anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. He is above and beyond all past prophets, priests, and kings,—the servants of the Highest,—each one of them having been a type of him, their highest honour having been that they could even faintly foreshadow him. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is he among the sons,"—"one of a thousand," the "first-born" of a race of "first-born," and "to be had in reverence" by *them*, by all, that are about him.

He is also invested with universal dominion. "Power over all flesh" belongs to him. He is the "first-born of every creature," the "heir of all things." "By him kings reign, and princes decree justice." In him alone has Joseph's dream been truly realised; and it is destined to receive its full accomplishment, in its full signification, when men of every rank, and name, and station,—"sun, moon, and stars,"—shall come and worship before him, and give him honour, as the "only-begotten of the Father."

The Baptist thus speaks of what Christ IS. He does not say that at some early period, long ere he entered on his great work on earth, he had been above all; nor that in some distant future era he shall be exalted to such pre-eminence and supremacy as he ascribes to him; but he asserts that he IS above all. Now he *is* above all, in all past ages he *is* above all, and for evermore he *is* above all! It is true, that as Mediator

he entered fully into his glory only when he ascended up on high. Even when, in the form of a servant, he occupied himself in fulfilling his covenant of suffering and obedience, during a season of temporary humiliation, and a veil covered, and in some sense concealed, the brightness of his glory, he laid not that glory aside. Then, as at all times, he was, without interruption, above all, because he is "from above," and is "in the bosom of the Father."

It was true, therefore, that Jesus "must increase." In his own person so glorious, in his assumed office so glorious, there could be no result but progress. And they who had separated from John's ministrations to unite themselves unto him, as well as all who had separated from the carnal services of the Mosaic ritual to do the same, did well,—did that which John's preaching, rightly understood, required, and that to which true spiritual obedience to the law of Moses must, in every instance, necessarily lead.

2. *John was of the earth.* Such was his origin, such is the origin of all men, whatever their eminence and value in the church may be, as compared with Christ. He is from above. They are of the earth—of Adam,—formed of the earth,—having the "earthly house" as their tabernacle. In all this the Baptist was like other men. The distinction of gifts and position which he enjoyed, raised him above all his predecessors, yet he was of "the earth, earthly,"—partaking of all the weakness and imperfection incident to and inherent in men who have their foundation in the dust. His condition, as compared with his

Lord's, was most humble. His native corruption and infirmities, his present frailty and speedy return to the dust from which he had been taken, made it so.

If in this view of John's condition he was the inferior of Jesus, he was his inferior also in his office and doctrine. The distinction between them was not more plainly declared by his *person* and character than by the place which he filled in the church, and the ministry which had been committed to him. He that is "earthly speaketh of the earth,"—the case which John evidently attributed to himself. Not that he asserted, or meant to assert, that either his office or doctrine was "earthly;" for both were from heaven. John was a man sent from God, and his baptism was from above. But he had not received either his commission or doctrine as Christ received his, — not immediately nor directly from God, as he had done: he was not able to say, like Christ, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." John had received both office and doctrine, as one taught upon earth, by an outward instrumentality, such as his condition required, and by the grace of the Spirit operating through that instrumentality. Moreover, his authority, whatever it might be, could not be compared to his Lord's, so that men might be commanded to hear the one as the other. His authority was derived direct from Christ; he held it from him. That authority was, therefore, as inferior to Christ's as earth is to heaven, or as the footstool is to the throne. "He that cometh from heaven is above all;"—a truth repeated, a statement twice made in a single sentence, once for his own disciples, and once for the disciples of Moses, whether they were present, or

only awaited in their retirement the message which might be conveyed to them.

Let us ever seek to be impressed with a sense of the glory of Christ as "head over all things,"—as "from above, and above all,"—as "the fulness of Him who filleth all in all,"—as holding the reins of universal government. Let our hearts overflow with high thoughts of his excellent majesty,—a majesty manifested by him in our nature and for us,—a majesty shining in all his character as the one Mediator between God and man. And let us bow before him, through grace, yielding to him the submission and the obedience that are due. "He is thy Lord, and worship thou him."

Let us seek to be impressed, also, with a sense of the subordinate place filled by all ministers,—by the prophets and priests of the Old Testament,—by the apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers of the New. Whilst Christ is "from heaven," and "above all," they are "of the earth, earthly," and have their office from him. Such is the distinction,—a distinction like to that which subsists between Him who made the stars and endowed them with their power and brilliant beauty, and the stars themselves,—between him who builds the house, and the house itself. Yet let us rejoice that he does employ his ministers. He holds the stars in his right hand, and he is the presiding influence wherever he has placed them. They who are of the "earth, earthly," "speak of the earth." They do speak; not indeed as Christ did, not even as angels do; yet they speak, though in a manner "earthly." Their words, their baptism, like John's, are, however, from heaven.

They serve, not under man's authority, but under His "who is in heaven;" and they so serve for all his gracious purposes towards the children of men, as well as with the promise of the Spirit's accompanying power. When we hear them, let us hear him,—ever asking and expecting that the word shall be made unto us "spirit and life,"—the "living seed by which we are begotten again to the lively hope" of the blessed heavenly home, and of eternal rest.

II. THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF HIS TEACHING AS THE GREAT TEACHER, AND THE GENERAL RESULT WHICH HITHERTO HAD FOLLOWED IT: "And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony."—(Ver. 32.)

1. *Christ's testimony is of what he has seen and heard.* Such was the distinctive character of his teaching; and in making this announcement to the parties present, John uttered truth of the same kind as Jesus himself spake to Nicodemus, and almost in the same terms.—(Ver. 11.) He declared generally that the knowledge of the will of God possessed by Christ, was possessed through his special relation to God from being in the bosom of the Father. Christ is indeed the Mediator,—in that respect acting in a subordinate capacity, as being necessarily of our nature; but his proper personal glory consists in his being "the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In the twofold glory of his person consist the security of that provision on which our souls rest in the prospect of eternity, and also the assurance that his

whole testimony, in whatever way given, is the testimony of what he has himself known directly, without the intervention of any third party, as well as what has been officially given unto him, — in short, of what he has "seen and heard." The peculiar privilege vouchsafed to Moses in his prophetical capacity eminently typified this. With him God spake "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend,"—a prefiguration—no more—of the grand reality revealed in the words before us,—a prefiguration of Christ's most blessed qualification to make known to a world which had cast off the knowledge of the God who made it, the mysteries of divine truth, as having been of the eternal counsels of the Godhead.

Under this gracious arrangement, be it remembered, we have received the entire Sacred Record. The volume of the book is the statement to us of what CHRIST has "seen and heard." That this record might be provided, his Spirit was imparted to prophets and holy men of old, as well as to their successors the apostles, whom he endowed and sent forth. Christ is therefore the "faithful and true witness." Our high distinctive privilege is, that we are permitted to know and hear that which HE saw and heard. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." This privilege is truly invaluable; but what if we be found to "neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him!" Consider, he was of the counsels of God,—a party to them,—fully cognisant of all the secret things which belong unto the Lord. And

it is he,—even he himself,—not an angel even,—who has spoken unto us. Warm and fresh from the highest heaven,—from its inmost recesses, and not as the second-hand tidings which might have circulated among heaven's exalted inhabitants in its outer courts,—the life-giving stream of divine, eternal truth has come to us by the SON OF GOD. Such is the boon which has been bestowed on our fallen world. Men speak to us, but they are the agents of Him who "saw and heard" what they speak. The law is dispensed by angels in the hands of a mediator, Moses at Sinai: but angels are no more than agents of a similar class with men, though of a different nature; and their honour is, that as such they serve Christ. John the Baptist appears, and utters his "voice in the wilderness;" it is a voice which proclaims the things which He who was to come after him had "seen and heard," and which by his Spirit that Lord had given unto him. Every man who speaks in the Saviour's name the words of this life, fulfils the same office; all are his agents and ambassadors. The distinction between him and them is, that he speaks of himself, and they speak from him. How then shall we escape, if we let slip the things which are delivered unto us? Transgression and disobedience in a matter so momentous cannot but receive a just recompense of reward. Of the righteous sentence which has gone forth against those who refuse Him who speaketh to us from heaven, let every man judge. Impressed with it, let every man take heed how he hears!

2. *The general result of this dispensation:* "And no man receiveth his testimony."

It was to be expected that when Christ came to "his own," they would "receive him,"—especially, that they who had been bidden to the marriage-feast, on receiving notice that all things were ready, and the King's Son actually come, would, at the call then given to them, hasten to avail themselves of the benefits provided for them. When, at sundry times, and in divers manners, Christ testified what he had "seen and heard," it was to be expected that men would welcome the glad tidings, and gratefully yield to the joyful sound the sincere and earnest homage of an undivided heart. This was not, however, the response made to his gracious invitations; and it never has been. *His own* received him not. Such has been the general result, in the history of the church, from the beginning until this day. The Lord has borne witness by his prophets, by himself personally, by his apostles, by pastors and teachers of every name; but "no man received," and no man now receiveth "his testimony." This is the melancholy fact recorded in general terms in this 32d verse. It has not absolutely or in every instance been so; that the following verse shows. As in a previous passage of this Gospel it is asserted that "his own received him not," though there were some who did, for it is added, "As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God;" so here, though it be declared that "no man receiveth his testimony," it is added, "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." The statement is thus qualified; yet the general truth remains as here announced, and is qualified only in a limited measure.

Such hitherto has been the result of the gospel,—the glorious gospel of the grace of God,—the gospel preached for salvation unto sinful men. They have not received it. Hitherto the proclamation of peace on earth and good-will to the children of men, has been rejected and laughed to scorn by the world; men have hid their faces from it, and have barred their hearts against it. Who shall speak of their guilt! who can declare their condemnation! God's eternal purpose has been made known by Him who "saw and heard,"—his purpose bearing on our eternal interests: yet the testimony has not been entertained; no timely concern for it has been manifested; no earnest attention has been given; no clear comprehension of the truth has ever been sought for;—it has not been embraced; it has not been trusted; it has not been loved; and it has not been fed on in the exercise of a living faith! "Who hath believed our report?" is the language which expresses the complaint of Christ against every generation which hitherto has enjoyed his oracles. The exceptions of those who have believed have been so few that they do not prevent the uniform painful declaration of the general accusation. The Scriptures proclaim it, and experience confirms this as true of all countries at all times. Christ has spoken,—he continues to speak: "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is unto the children of men;" but in vain does he address himself to them. Like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears, they will not hearken. In Noah's hearers,—the spirits now in prison,—those to whom he once proclaimed the great things of God,—we have a lively example of all hearers of the gospel of God's

grace in every period of the church. And shall God not visit for such iniquity as this? Can we be too much alarmed lest we should be found to fall after the same manner of unbelief? "Awake, thou that sleepest,"—awake, and be not chargeable with possessing a promise of entering into rest, with enjoying such opportunity and privilege, and coming short of it through unbelief. "We put you in remembrance how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not." The day of salvation has not closed; it is still to you the accepted time, your time of visitation: to-morrow may close your day!

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF RECEIVING THIS TESTIMONY: "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."—(Ver. 33.)

A matter for solemn consideration is here announced. When Christ testifieth what he has seen and heard, God thereby submits himself to the judgment of the minds and consciences of men. The "words of God," spoken by Him whom he hath sent, are truth to which he pledges himself. It has pleased him to speak that truth by his Son from heaven. He summons men to hear. They can have a full knowledge of his character in no other way: he demands that they shall therefore consider the testimony thus uttered, keeping in view the form in which it is presented; and that they shall testify to his veracity therein. We know what truth is revealed; we know that mercy, grace, glory, by the mediation of the Lord Jesus, and through faith in his name, are proclaimed: innumerable promises are

put upon record, all connected with this great salvation, referring to every condition in which man can be placed, and intended to meet his case, whatever it may be. God is pledged to all these. He asserts his righteousness in giving his promises, looking to the ground on which they are given; he also declares his faithfulness in them, and he calls man to consider and to test that faithfulness. Heaven and earth may pass, but his word shall not pass. He connects the manifestation of his glory with our putting his faithfulness to the proof, with our experiencing its truth, and with our openly and honestly confessing to his praise what we have found it. When any one embraces the promises in and with Christ; when he receives God's word into his heart; when he comes to know and feel in himself that the testimony which he has accepted is actually accomplished; when he publishes this,—then he "sets to his seal that God is true."

It is most certain that they who receive Christ and his doctrine, find that they have to do with a true God. They find that he is not a man that he should lie, that he has not deceived, and that he will not disappoint them. Speaking in his name, as his ministers, we constantly affirm this; we proclaim this in contradiction to all the misrepresentations of the enemy, and all the unbelief of men. The truth of God is, indeed, opposed to all that is in the world; but it is the truth,—truth vitally important for time and for eternity. Our entreaty, in the name of the Lord, is, that men may come and see. They who do come, and who give heed to the things which are spoken, will, every one of them, in the end, without fail, "set to

their seal that God is true," and shall so honour his name; for that which we speak of him is the truth, and no lie. Lot received the testimony of angels, he received by them God's message to him, and was soon qualified to set to his seal that God is true! The people of Samaria heard from their poor neighbour tidings of Jesus, the truth of which they put to the test, and were soon enabled to set to their seal that God is true! She who came behind Jesus in the crowd, timidly approaching his person, having previously received his testimony, as soon as she touched the hem of his garment, had reason, in like manner, to set to her seal that God is true! Her faith in Jesus, not her touching his garment, made her whole. On the occasion when her cure was wrought, many pressed on the person of Christ more than she, for the multitude thronged him; but that they did so brought no blessing to them. Her faith was her blessing. So is it on all occasions with those who believe. Their experience, when they embrace the gospel for the salvation of their souls, uniformly is, that in all that he has spoken God is true! What a precious fact is this in a world of insincerity, of fraud and falsehood! God is true, though every man should be a liar. His word, like himself, changeth not. Hath he said, and shall he not do his will? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Let our souls repose on this sure foundation. Let us retire into the secret of the Lord's pavilion, where nothing that maketh a lie can enter; and hearing him speaking to us by the lips of Jesus, let us believe, nothing doubting, and let us await, with joyful confidence, the issue of

every thing that concerns us, which is ordained according to his word.

Remember what, as declared in the divine record, and as proved by all experience, the present condition of the world is,—a condition of darkness,—a condition in which men have gone after God's enemy, have believed him, and have discredited their great Creator. In these circumstances, God might vindicate his glory, and establish his truth, by destroying without remedy a world so ungodly. This he does not; for he has his revealed purpose of mercy to accomplish. That purpose is to be accomplished only through Christ: and the execution of it is assured to men only by their belief of the truth which Christ testifies,—by their belief of the things which he hath seen and heard. The enemy's work, therefore, is to exclude the light and to prevent the exercise of faith,—to misrepresent and traduce the truth by all means; and also to blind men's minds by strong delusions, that they may believe any lie rather than the thing that is true! What a striking fact is it, and how can it be accounted for but by Satanic agency operating on human corruption, that the pure gospel of the grace of God, wherever it comes, is ever accounted new doctrine in the world! Men ever think that strange things are brought to their ears by the gospel; and though they may admit that it has, even to the natural mind, a charm which nothing else spoken in the name of God has,—that it awakens emotions which, like the happy recollections of long past childhood, seem to tell that the soul once knew and loved what the joyful sound now testi-

fies,—yet the obedience of faith is withheld. They who listen to it may wonder, and say, "We have heard strange things;" or rejoice, and entreat that the same words may be spoken to them again; or tremble, and exclaim, "When we have a convenient season, we will call for thee;" but through the power of the god of this world, the gospel, to those who are of the world, is always as a thing not indigenous there,—not desirable, not trustworthy, not to be received as having authority, nor employed as a medium of real consolation. When, however, any poor sinner escapes this snare of the wicked one,—when he is at length persuaded to give heed to the things which are spoken,—when power from above induces and enables him to apprehend the message,—when he tests God's word by every means, under all circumstances, and on all occasions,—forthwith he discards his fatal unbelief, and sets to his seal that God is true. Then he finds all that he had been told to be truth and verity,—he finds that not one tittle of the testimony fails; and he proclaims his experience. Pardon through Christ, acceptance with God on the ground of the great atonement, a heart of love for Him through the power of a new life,—all bestowed as the gift of grace,—then become his. He may, indeed, thereafter have seasons of conflict,—severe trials of his faith. Sometimes it may seem to him that he is tempted above measure, and he may fear that he is to be confounded: that, however, is impossible. The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried. As a wrestler with him, he is made to take hold on them, and to wait his good time. Since the world began, none

have been confounded who have trusted God and waited for his promise; none shall be confounded world without end. Mountains of impossibilities may seem to rise on every hand, opposed to all that he desires and expects; but the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed. The Lord who hath had mercy on him says it, and it shall be done. In this God is glorified. All saved men, all spiritual believers, all who live on every word which proceedeth out of his mouth, exalt and honour and testify to him. Such is the importance of faith,—such its preciousness, as the fruit of grace, as the evidence of God's saving work, in delivering us, and bestowing eternal life on our much injured souls.

How dreadful is that word, "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar!"

One part of the offence of unbelievers is, to be negligent, indifferent, disobedient,—to live as if it belonged not to them to be interested with Christ's testimony, or concerned about it. In this they fall into a fatal error, and they also come to a conclusion most offensive and destructive. Let all who are of this character consider, that if God has condescended to speak to them,—if he has brought his gospel to them, or has brought them within sound of the gospel, that sound being ever in their ears; if, in his providence, he has thus ordered matters in their lot, in this there is sufficient evidence that to them it certainly does belong to be interested in, and occupied with, the testimony of the glorious Saviour. They have to do with that testimony,—they have to dispose of the great question of

duty regarding it,—and at their peril they neglect it. Each one of them has as much to do with it as if he were the solitary remaining individual of the whole human race,—as if he heard the voice from heaven, a solitary relic of departed myriads. God speaks as specially to every sinner, by the gospel, as his voice from heaven spoke to Cain, or as Christ amidst the stillness of the night spoke to Nicodemus. Let offenders of the class now addressed beware of taking shelter under such a refuge as the notion that they are not parties called on, like others, to deal with the examination of God's message, called on to test and to prove it. With regard to that duty there are no exceptions. All who hear the word are under equal obligation. Their duty is so to learn "Christ," that they may set to their seal that God is true.

But if neglect and disregard be one part of the offence committed against God in the matter of Christ's testimony, that "men make him a liar" by not believing, is another, and the greater offence. In courts of law, in ancient times, a witness gave his statement of that which he professed was truth. Having done so, parties present who were cognisant of the veracity of the speaker, or who were in circumstances that they might be expected to be so, when called on to testify their knowledge, in confirmation of what had been asserted, by doing this set to their seal that what had been spoken was true, and that the witness who had spoken was faithful. But parties who, being thus appealed to, and being qualified to testify, declined to speak in corroboration of the testimony

delivered, were held, by that declining, to make the witness a LIAR. To this practice allusion is made in the text. God hath spoken by his Son to the world; he has spoken that which all men may know, that which all men are bound to know to be true, that they may be able to confirm it as his word of truth. Being commanded to become acquainted with the things which are spoken, they are then, as a great duty, commanded to bear testimony to the truth, to the veracity of Him by whom it has been uttered. When they refuse to know what God speaks, they offend against his *authority.* When they refuse to testify to the truth,—to set to their seal that he is true in the Word which has been given to them,—they offend against his *veracity,* they make him a liar. Before heaven and the world they decline to do that which so closely concerns his honour and glory, as well as their own interests; and they are guilty of putting him to shame. All God's creatures have been formed to praise him, each in the way suited to its nature. Men must praise him by seeing his glory, and setting to their seal that he is true, —by believing in him, and by testifying to his veracity. This they cannot do if they receive not the testimony of Him who hath testified what he hath "seen and heard." To be without faith in Christ, through the acceptance of the gospel of his grace, is, therefore, to come short of the high end of our creation,—it is to resist God, and fatally to oppose ourselves to his blessed and glorious designs of goodness towards the children of men! Who will continue to be guilty of so heinous a transgression? Let all seek grace to be delivered from the power of the blinding

influence of the god of this world, by whom they are seduced into the commission of such evil,—by whom they are so deceived and destroyed.

And let Christ's saved ones live to exalt him, by knowing his truth, by believing his word,—by believing the things which he declares directly from the bosom of the Father, and by testifying to them as the truth, as what they know to be the truth,—the truth which makes men wise unto salvation through faith. In a little while, ALL shall see that God is indeed light, and that in him is no darkness at all.

CHRIST IN HIS PROPHETICAL OFFICE.

"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."—John iii. 34–36.

We have now arrived at the close of the Baptist's concluding testimony to Jesus. He still speaks in reply to the invidious statements of the disciples who had come to him in their own name, and in the name of the Jews with whom they had been disputing "about purifying;" and his words are intended, as all that he had ever uttered had been intended, to exalt Christ, that by so doing he might fulfil the ministry with which he had been intrusted. Here he speaks,—I. *Of Christ's excellency in his prophetical office;* II. *Of his dignity, as the appointed source of all good to the whole church; and,* III. *Of the safety of the soul as depending on its relation to him.*

I. Christ's excellency in his prophetical office: "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."—(Ver. 34.)

The connection between these words and the preceding

doctrine is obvious. They constitute a continuation and an expansion of the important truth with which we were occupied in the former discourse. The grand distinction between Christ and all other messengers who have been sent from God, was, that he testified what he "saw and heard." In the bosom of the Father from eternity, and having been of his counsels, he declared him and his glory, as relating that of which he was a personal and immediate witness. His position, as a messenger of the Father, was that which none other could occupy,—that with which no comparison could be instituted on the part of messengers who were of the earth, earthly, and who spake of the earth,—messengers whose information was conveyed to them by inspiration, or through the ordinary channels of communication with the mind of God which he has himself opened. All such messengers received their knowledge from Christ, for they were his things which the Holy Ghost "shewed" unto them.

Revealed truth, in its substance, treats of the great question which stands for decision between God and the sinful inhabitants of this world, whom he formed for himself, who have destroyed themselves, but whom he would save. That truth he submits to the judgment of their mind and conscience, demanding that they shall consider it, and that they shall decide the claims which it makes on their submission, as parties having in it a vital interest. It is the only truth of real instant importance with which men have to do. All other questions, in comparison to that between God and men's souls, are utterly contemptible. Other questions affect interests that are of import-

ance but for a day: this affects interests whose issues extend into eternity; for the course which men take here must lead either, on the one hand, to testifying to the veracity of God, and thus, in the circumstances of this world, to discharging a first duty; or, on the other, to making God a liar, and thus to committing sin and incurring guilt of a character that must make their condition hopeless, and that must finally class them with the victims of endless destruction and despair. In a matter so deeply solemn, the original Messenger to convey God's testimony, he is careful to inform us, was very glorious. To turn away from him, consequently, when he speaks,—showing, as this must do, the worst disregard of God's grace,—can bring nothing but ruin.

1. He is "*He whom God hath sent.*"

His mission is the measure of divine love to the world. God *so* loved the world that he sent him. He sent other messengers. John himself was a man sent from God. The prophets were men similarly honoured, as from time to time they appeared in the world. He sent them all. In an important manner, they, of every name, who in faithfulness proclaim the doctrine of salvation by Jesus Christ, are sent; for "how can they preach except they be sent?" Should any man run unsent, he must run in vain. But it is true, notwithstanding, that in a sense not applicable to any other,—either angel, or prophet, or apostle, or pastor,—Christ is "he whom God hath sent." That distinction belongs to him alone: he is in effect the only messenger who has come from God. As there is but one sun in the firmament, the source of all the

light which has ever at any time, in any form or degree, illuminated this earth,—though men have furnished themselves with many derived lights, all of which owe their virtue to that great source of all light; so there is but one messenger from God,—one great centre of illumination for the use of all who are beyond the limits of the light that is unapproachable. That centre is Christ, of whom it is ever true that he "speaketh the words of God." Others spake as they were moved, and, having served their generation, passed from the firmament in which they had had for a time their place; but he "SPEAKETH" still,—speaketh now as he did from the beginning, and shall do without end. Who shall declare *his* generation? In this distinctive glory of his prophetical office consists one part of the excellency which belongs to Christ.

2. *They are the words of God which he speaketh.*

It is true of every minister, if he be at all a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,—true of every one who is a minister indeed, from the greatest of them to the least,—that he "speaketh the words of God." If he speak in God's name other words, words which are not his, it will surely be required at his hand; and a solemn reckoning on this head awaits all who have, at any time, professed themselves to be ambassadors, and who have undertaken to execute that office. The commission given to Moses, as an ambassador, ran in these terms:—"Go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say:" to Jonah, "Go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee:" and to the Jews the privilege belonged, that, through

all their prophets, "the oracles of God" were committed to them. But, in a sense far higher than that which any of these expressions conveys, and than any of them was intended to convey, the terms of our text are employed of Christ. When of him it is said that "he speaketh the words of God," the expression is equivalent to that other expression, "He that speaketh from heaven," as opposed to the expression, "He that speaketh of the earth." It seems more than probable, that if John did not directly quote the words of the great promise given to the church by Moses, he made allusion to that promise, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put *my words* in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that *I shall command* him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not hearken unto *my words*, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." "If any man speak," saith the Spirit by Peter, "let him speak as the oracles of God." Jesus spoke not merely "*as* the oracles of God," but he spoke the very "oracles" themselves—the very "words of God." We cannot doubt, therefore, that the Baptist, in the statement before us, claims for him the special honour predicted of the Messiah,—claims for him that, in his ministry, as compared to the ministry of all others, of whatever name, in his ministry alone, the prophecy by Moses received its fulfilment,—a prophecy far more glorious than the carnal impressions of the Jews permitted them in their circumstances to comprehend. The beloved disciple, in vision in Patmos, on an occasion of high jubilee, heard the voice of one who addressed him,

and proclaimed a time of rejoicing, say, "These are the true sayings of God." John, awed and humbled, immediately fell at the feet of him who had spoken, "to worship him." We naturally inquire why he acted so: we inquire what there was in the expression which had been employed to induce such a course on the part of the apostle? The answer seems to be, that having heard the voice, he came to the conclusion that he was in the immediate presence of Jesus himself,—that it was Jesus who, in vision, had spoken to him with his own lips; for who could speak "the true sayings of God," but he whose office it is to "speak the words of God"? The warning, "See thou do it not; I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus," prevented the act of idolatry, of which he was about unwittingly to be guilty; but the conviction produced in him by the expression which this "fellow-servant" had employed, clearly manifested what was associated in his mind with that expression,—clearly manifested his knowledge of the authority from which alone could proceed "the true sayings of God,"—his knowledge of the excellency which, in his prophetical office, belongs to Christ.

3. "*God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*"

The "Spirit" thus spoken of, is none other than the Holy Ghost, the third person of the ever blessed Trinity. Of him it is distinctly asserted that he was "given" to Christ,—given in his divine operations, graces, and gifts. This, of course, means that, as mediator, Christ was endowed with the Spirit. In his own essential nature, he is the Eternal Spirit, as the Father is the Eternal Spirit, and

as the Holy Ghost is the Eternal Spirit. The text does not speak of his essential nature, which is underived, and in no sense given, or communicated, unto him: but it does speak of his person as mediator; it speaks of him as God's servant in the great work of man's salvation; it speaks of him as the head of the body, as the first-born of many brethren. In this capacity the Spirit was *given* unto him. By the Spirit's agency his humanity was formed and prepared; by him it was endowed and qualified; by him it was provided and upheld in all the great obedience of which he had experience; especially, by him it was made triumphant in the dread trial of the suffering unto death which he underwent, as by him it was quickened when his dead body lay in the grave, so that he rose, having died unto sin once, that he should die no more.

The Spirit was given unto Christ, but "not by measure." There was no limit to the extent in which the Spirit was bestowed on him, and no limit to the extent in which he was received by him. The amount of the Spirit's gifts and operations in the Son of man was beyond all computation, whether of angels or men: it was infinitely great; for as the Father was free and the Holy Ghost able to bestow in such measure, the Son was equally free and able to receive. But being thus endowed, holding so exalted a position, though viewed as a servant, behold how it comes that "he speaketh the words of God"! In the statement which the Baptist thus makes, he referred to the prophets,—to all his own predecessors in the distinguished office which he

held,—and also to himself. They had the Spirit given unto them,—given to endow and qualify them for the work on which they were severally commissioned,—given to dwell in them for God's purposes,—given in a most precious degree, that the church in all ages, through them, and the faithful execution of their office, might be blessed. Yet this was always done under such limitations as were necessary in their circumstances,—necessary, as having respect to their limited capacity, and to the limited occasions for which they were raised up, furnished, and commissioned. To Christ the Spirit was given without any limit,—any limit rendered necessary, either by his nature or by the circumstances in which he was called to accomplish the will of God. As one star differeth from another star in glory, so did the prophets and holy men of old differ the one from the other as to the brilliancy with which they shone as lights in the world. Like the great orb of day, in full strength,—all light, and having no darkness at all, incapable also of receiving more light, and ever giving forth to every other object the light that is in him,—was and is Christ, when compared to other servants who have been sent to speak the "words of God." Of such plenitude is his excellency in his prophetical office.

Viewing Christ in the glory which belongs to him in that office, as the Scriptures universally testify, and as John here declares it, say with what reverence and humility of soul ought he to be heard and obeyed! He was SENT to speak the very "words of God," the things which he "saw and heard;" he was qualified to speak these words

as no one ever had been, and as no mere creature was ever capable of being; he was qualified in the manner which a work so stupendous as that of communicating God's mind to sinners demanded: God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him; but in immeasurable proportion he anointed him, and poured grace into his lips. Say, then, with what ears we ought to hear, with what hearts we ought to receive, that which he makes known? Can any obligation equal in solemnity and weight the obligation to "hearken" unto him? Say if there be not a reason for the dreadful threatening which has been uttered against those who will not hearken? To what words shall we listen in preference to his? To what words, in our daily practice, do we listen in preference to his? How shall any man be able to answer it, that he has an ear for other voices, though he has none, or almost none, for that which speaks to him from heaven; for that which comes from the inmost shrine of God's secret dwelling-place; for that which is uttered by Him who, though the "Son of man," is "fairer than the sons of men,"—by Him in whom the Spirit dwells without limitation, that he may speak "the words of God," and in whom he dwells as the fulness of the Godhead bodily,—the fulness of Him who filleth all in all? Little do men generally consider the guilt which they incur when they "turn away" from the Messenger of the covenant, from the Prophet whom the Lord our God hath raised up. O that we were wise! "O that thou hadst hearkened! then thy peace should have been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

The forewarning written is: "As it was in the days of

Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man; likewise, also, as it was in the days of Lot, even so shall it be in the day when the Son of man shall be revealed." Let it not be so with us. With such examples before us, let us fear. Who can tell the guilt of those who have the things which were seen and heard by Christ, and detailed by himself, constantly set forth before their eyes, and then choose the very opposite! The instruction and warning which were given to sinners before the flood, and to the sinners of Sodom, despised, resisted, disobeyed by them, as they were, occasioned the aggravation of offence under which they perished. If similar offence shall occur in other cases, can we wonder that God hath said, "I will require it"? May it be our attainment through grace to be able to say, "But we have the mind of Christ."

II. CHRIST'S DIGNITY AS THE APPOINTED SOURCE OF ALL GOOD TO THE WHOLE CHURCH: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."—(Ver. 35.)

For the use of this New Testament language, and its application to the Messiah, the Baptist had the warrant of Old Testament revelation. He could appeal to such testimony in that record as, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee"—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." And he could appeal especially for his warrant to speak of Christ in the terms employed in this verse, to the voice which came from heaven at his baptism, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Of that voice John's disciples were not igno-

rant: the allusion to it now, and the intention of the allusion, seem obviously to have been that they might be reminded of the glory of Christ, that they might not wonder that he had proclaimed the great things of him which he had made known, and that they might also be painfully convinced of the sin which was involved in refusing to hearken to him.

"The Father loveth the Son." As in this John speaks of the relation subsisting from eternity between that Father and the Son, so it is of the love which the Father has for Christ in his essential glory that he speaks. Love is the perfect expression of the Father's soul towards the Son; and who can tell what is involved of magnitude and of mystery in such a truth? He is "the Son of his love"—"the beloved of the Lord"—his David—his Solomon. It is as if there were but one object of love before the Father's mind, that object being Christ! Types were employed to represent this mystery,—types of the most tender character, such as that of the love of Abraham for Isaac,—Isaac, in one sense, his father's *only son*. The Father's love for the Son rests on the Son's person,—on his person in his essential glory, but on his person also as involving his mediatorial glory. His assuming humanity did not change nor modify that love. His assuming sin to his spotless humanity, according to the will of the Father, did not change nor modify it. His enduring all the consequences connected with his humiliation did not change nor modify it. We cannot say that the obedience of Christ,—the obedience which, as the "Son," he learned by the things which he suffered,—increased the Father's

love towards him, for that which is perfect and infinite is incapable of increment; but we can say, and the Baptist here says it, looking at Jesus as the "Word made flesh,"—the Son of God "descended,"—parted from the Father,—dwelling among men on the earth, —"The Father loveth the Son!"—more than which could not be said of his love for Christ, when he beholds him on the heights of his heavenly glory. Here the truth presented to our faith is, not that God loved the world, but that "he loveth the Son." True, he loves the world,—he loves sinners of mankind; he loves some with the love of good-will,—those who have not as yet been made heirs of salvation; and he loves others with the love of delight, when he contemplates with grateful satisfaction the fruit of his own grace, as it appears in them, the result of the salvation of which they have been made partakers. But though he bestows such love on our race, it is not that in their nature there is that which his nature can love,—that which, fallen and degraded as they are, can inspire affection in the heart of God. Not even in angels, viewing them simply in themselves,—viewing them simply as creatures, necessarily imperfect, as inferior to himself, as dependent, liable to fall, and preserved and upheld only by a power which is not their own,—not even in their nature, thus viewed, is there that which the nature of God can love, as we now speak of his love. But he "LOVETH THE SON." Moreover, for the Son's sake, and in him, he loves the "world," and he loves "angels." Contemplating both in "the Son," he loves them. He loves the

"world" of the saved, with delight in the condition which has been produced by their union to Christ; and with delight in their character, the fruit of that condition. He loves with the love of good-will those who are yet lying in sin, he bears with them even when they are vessels of wrath fitting for destruction, and he waits to be gracious to the very chief of them who will submit to the righteousness of Christ, and return by that way unto him. The nature and extent of the Father's love to the Son we cannot know; no finite mind can comprehend, no human emblem can describe *that* love. It is a love infinite and eternal,—a love expressed in the honour, and glory, and might, and dominion, and power, which have been bestowed on him by the Father,—of which who can speak?

"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." Meditate on the truth that the Father loveth the Son: let your heart be filled with a sense of that sublime mystery. Then meditate on the blessed arrangement, that, so loving the Son, he hath committed unto him the salvation of a lost world. Salvation is in God's eyes most precious,—so precious that he has not intrusted it to any creature, however exalted,—so precious that he has not employed in devising and effecting it any agency inferior to that of the Son whom he loveth. If God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son to be the propitiation for its sins, he so loved the Son that he gave all things into his hands,—that he intrusted to him the mighty achievement of human redemption,—in connection with that work, appointing him to possess a name which is above every name, and to be filled with all

the fulness of God. "All things" are thus in the hands of the Son. The Spirit is given unto him without measure,—all attributes, gifts, operations, graces of the Spirit. In him is vested the entire authority connected with the dispensation of the Spirit. All government is in his hands; and thus it occurs, according to divine, infinite wisdom and grace, and according to the purpose of God before the world began, that salvation is stored up in Christ, and is to be sought and obtained only in him. Behold the love, behold the honour and glory, which are conferred on Christ; but behold the privileges, unspeakable, which are provided for men. God has confided us, and confided our cause, to none inferior to the Son whom he loves! "The Father loveth the Son," and hath done this for us. His love for the Son is from eternity, and it is a love unchangeable as it is eternal. The salvation of man is by the Son, and has the glorious security of that love which the Father bestows on him! Let our hearts overflow with a sense of this most blessed provision of God's grace. That there might be no shade of doubt, not even the faintest, of the Father's intentions of benevolence and mercy toward us,—that there might be the unquestionable assurance of the unalterable nature of the salvation bestowed on sinners,—this salvation is by divine decree in the Son, whom the Father has loved from eternity, and whom he loveth now for ever; redemption has been intrusted to him; the proclamation of the redemption, that it may be accepted by sinners, has been intrusted to him; the grace which is required to make the redemption effectual in its application to each individual who is to be

saved, has been intrusted to him; the whole circumstances and arrangements connected with the calling and establishing of the elect have been intrusted to him; the wonderful work of their preservation in the love of God, their being kept so that they shall not perish, but, every one of them, be raised up at the last day, and be presented faultless before God in heaven at last, has been intrusted to him. "I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me."

All this being true, surely the testimony of the Son, the testimony of Him who "speaketh the words of God," is to be received. The Son, whom the Father loves, we are bound to love and to hear. "Kiss ye the Son." "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." To the Son, to whom the Father hath given all things, we are bound, in obedience to the Father's will, to render all things which we possess. Such is the grand duty: to render ourselves first, then to render all that we call ours. The Almighty God has withheld nothing from him,—shall we withhold any thing? They who obey in this, fulfil the end of their being; and obeying, they are enabled to set to their seal that God is true. They unite with the Father, they unite with the Holy Ghost, in giving glory to the Son. Thus obeying,

they proclaim that Christ is the true God, the Son of the Father; they proclaim that he is the true and only Mediator promised to the world: they proclaim that he is the true God, the beloved of the Father, because all things are in his hands as the supreme disposer of every blessing; they proclaim that he is the true and only Mediator, because the Father is well pleased for his righteousness' sake, and hath committed unto him the kingdom. Life is squandered and lost, the purpose of God in bestowing life is frustrated, if it be not crowned with the glorious result of this obedience. All is gained if we are brought to *it*, —if we are brought to the obedience of the just.

III. The safety of the soul is dependent on its relation to Christ: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." —(Ver. 36.)

Nothing can be more clear than that salvation, and all which is connected therewith, is laid up in Christ as the fountain; and likewise, that it is committed or intrusted to him as its dispensing author. Not less clear is the truth, that salvation is to be sought in Christ, and that from him it is to be accepted. The soul can have everlasting life in no other way. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "As many as *received him*, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as *believed on his name*." To receive him personally,—to receive him on the testimony which the gospel utters,—to receive him as the Son of the Father,—

the Son who was in heaven, and who came from heaven,—the Son to whom is given power to bless men, and to endow them with all the glories of the great salvation,—the Son from whom all things are to be sought, according to the will of the Father;—to receive him thus, under the grace of the Spirit, is "everlasting life." Faith cometh by hearing,—by hearing Him who speaketh the "words of God;" and thus to receive him is the act of faith.

To the duty of believing we are authoritatively called,—to the blessed privileges which follow believing we are invited: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else"—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price"—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." So giveth he "everlasting life." It is a life which, communicated to the soul now, is, in this present world, possessed and enjoyed. Communicated here, it is preserved also by the same grace which imparts it,—preserved amidst every quenching influence. It may, many a time, be in a decaying condition; it may seem, like the light which burns in some frail vessel afloat upon a stormy sea, that, by every succeeding surge of temptation and of worldly

intrusion, it must be for ever extinguished; but it survives. Obscured temporarily again and again, it nevertheless re-appears it revives; and increases under all destructive influences, until, in the full blaze of the brightness into which it has been kindled by the breath of heaven alone, that haven receives it where no danger shall any longer be encountered, and where no extinguishing power shall at all exist,—the appointed home of its mature existence and of its perfect development. It is "everlasting life."

Well may we ask, Why are men opposed to the gospel, which offers this "gift of God"? Why do men refuse to close with Christ, to believe in the Son? Why do they decline to enter into the relation with God which such faith on the Son implies? Is it because sacrifices (so called) must be made? because other connections must be broken up, other ties dissolved? because objects of regard, which seem indispensable to our happiness, must be abandoned, while that to which we are asked to commit ourselves is untried and unknown? Ah! be not deceived; let not the god of this world (the god of that condition of the world which he has himself induced) blind your minds. Be not beguiled by him. Be assured the "pearl of great price," even for the present time, is worth all that you can part with, a thousand times told; and be assured, also, that by retaining the things which are earthly at the cost of that "pearl," you lose all that is precious, you forfeit eternity, you purchase everlasting woe.

"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Unbelief is the sin which shall for ever destroy both soul and body. In its

nature it is the opposite of the grace of which we have been speaking; the grace which receives Christ personally, which rests on him, which applies to him unremittingly, which ever draws from his fulness every supply, and dedicates all again to his praise. Unbelief refuses the testimony which reveals Christ, it rejects the record of what he saw and heard. Unbelief declines all personal alliance with Christ, and wickedly opposes God's glorious purpose of revealing to angels and to men the surpassing excellence of his own nature in the work of redemption, in the person of his only-begotten Son. It is the fruit of an evil heart, of a heart set on its wickedness. The heart of unbelief is given to its idolatry,—an idolatry always mean and base, even when, in the estimation of the world, great, costly, and magnificent. The wickedness which distinguishes it, is the preference which it gives to the objects of its worship over Christ and all the glory that the Father hath put upon him: the flesh-pots, the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, the garlick, are far more than all the blessedness of the land of promise! The *reception* of Christ implies a heart renewed; a heart enlightened, the god of this world no longer its master; a heart weaned from the objects to which it was once given, and no longer debased; a heart made tender, and taught to appreciate the things which are unseen and eternal; a heart sanctified by the power and indwelling of the ever blessed Spirit.

The gospel sets before us a glorious inheritance; it proposes it to us that we may go up and possess it. That the gospel has come to us, that we are in circumstances

in which we hear that word continually, is the proof that such is our condition of privilege. The inheritance *may* become ours. This is set before us as a prospect in no way unreasonable. Under God's guidance we may enter upon the enjoyment of it; by his power; in obedience to his command; in accomplishment of his purpose; to the honouring of his Son. Objections which we might be ready to urge against our prospects, are taken out of the way,—objections from the greatness of the undertaking, from our own weakness, from God's secret purposes, from the power of our enemies, from the risks and dangers of the journey,—all are taken out of the way. In these circumstances unbelief is an enormous evil, and no wickedness can be compared to it. It implies a deliberate despising of the good land, a deliberate contempt of God's love for our precious souls, a deliberate and most profligate disregard of his great design to show forth the divine glory in and by our salvation through the "Word made flesh." Unbelief makes God a liar,—casts discredit on all that he has spoken by his Son: in as far as it can, it dethrones God and reverses all his gracious purposes. How frightful is it that the love of sin should be the parent of a monster so hideous! Who would not be warned? Who would not cast down the weapons of unbelief? Who would not cry for deliverance from a resistance so unnatural as it involves, from a conflict so hopeless?

"He shall not see life;" the unbeliever shall never possess, never enjoy, that precious gift. LIFE includes all that is valuable. For life temporal a man would give all his

possessions, all that he hath. A price cannot be put even on that life, short though it be and held by a tenure the frailest and most uncertain. The Baptist speaks not of life temporal: he speaks of spiritual, everlasting life; of the divine nature communicable to us, and of all the good which the possession of that nature brings. Unbelief deprives the soul of it, of eternal life,—deprives the soul now, deprives it for ever and ever. That life is treasured up in Christ, and is nowhere else; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The Father loveth him, and hath given unto him alone to be the author of eternal salvation. He fulfils that blessed office, however, to those only who "obey him;" to those only who choose him, who join themselves unto him, who believe on him, who rest exclusively on his grace; to those only who in such a sense "obey," who render the obedience of a living faith. To all who are "disobedient," and who "stumble at the word," he is a "stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." They "shall not see life." Alas! shall an intimation so solemn not arouse us! Let us be assured that the composure which health, and outward prosperity, and the absence of immediate fear of dissolution occasion, must soon cease. What madness, then, is it to make such good our stay for a single hour! The agitation of the last sickness, of approaching death, and of our departure to meet our God, cannot, in the case of any of us, be far off. Any day or any hour may see us involved in the terrible conflict of that war from which there is no discharge. If at such a time a mind well instructed in the truth of which I now speak, should give power to the con-

science, in what aspect shall unbelief then appear? Sin unspeakable and unpardonable it will appear! Even before that time, sinners in such a condition may be brought into agony of soul so great, as to make them call on the mountains and rocks to fall on them, to hide them from the face of the Lamb, against whom they have committed their great transgression! Would that we bethought ourselves! Would that, in our time of visitation, we turned unto the Lord!

"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; *but the wrath of God abideth on him.*" Unbelief, depriving the soul of life,—the life of God in Christ,—making the soul a withered, fruitless, joyless thing throughout eternity, —were an evil of magnitude sufficiently terrific; but as the occasion of a calamity still more appalling, it becomes an object of horror greater than its mere power of deprivation can make it. Unbelief brings on the soul the positive infliction of wrath, of the wrath of God. Divine wrath is the punishment, the wages, justly due to sin. As the substitute of the redeemed, Christ endured the punishment. On him the fire of heaven fell for his saved ones,—the righteous vindication, by punishment, of the broken law and the injured glory of God. He was crucified through weakness; the load bore him to the earth; divine, infinite power alone preserved and sustained him, and prevented his being overwhelmed.

The same wrath shall fall on the man who believeth not the Son, because he believeth not on the only-begotten Son of God. Moreover, that wrath "*abideth* on him." It abode not on Christ, for he exhausted its power: it "abideth"

on the sinner, for after Christ there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. A fearful looking for of judgment,—of judgment ever present and ever future,—shall constitute his wretched lot, for ever and ever. No escape can exist. There was none for Christ himself when the powers of hell took hold on him, when the cup which sin had mingled was placed in his hand. God spared not him,—and how should he spare sinners themselves? Notwithstanding his love for him, he spared him not, when sin was imputed to him; and how shall he spare sinners, who, while they suffer, become more and more worthy of suffering? If there be abiding, unchanging, eternal blessing, through grace, for those who "believe on the Son;" there is abiding, unchanging, eternal wrath, in justice, for those who believe not, for those who despise or neglect the great salvation which, at so unspeakable a cost, he has provided.

John's disciples had ignorantly sought to excite prejudice in their master's mind against One whom, in their folly, they counted his rival. Their words to John were words which showed their carnality and want of faith. They evidently roused him; and in the discourse which he pronounced, correcting their error, and repelling their insinuations, so injurious to the Lord, we have the earnest pleadings of a preacher who laboured, at once to exalt the great name of Him whom he loved and served, and to save the souls of those to whom he spake.

Could John's disciples now do otherwise than hasten to Jesus, than touch his sceptre extended to them, submit to his authority, render the obedience of faith, and yield

captive every thought to the obedience of Christ? In deep affection and earnest faith, John, no doubt, sought such fruit of his ministry. Who can tell but the Spirit of all grace sealed his word of exhortation? who can tell but of the poor prejudiced hearers who stood before him it might thenceforth be said, "Are they not brands plucked out of the fire?"

"May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." Amen.

THE END.

ERRATUM.

Page 266, line 5 from bottom, *for* "that meat is for the belly, and not the belly for meat," *read*, "meats for the belly, and the belly for meats."

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